

THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE CULT  
OF THE GODDESS MANASĀ

by

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## A B S T R A C T

This work aims at a critical study of the early history of the goddess Manasā. It is divided into eight chapters excluding introduction and summary and conclusion.

The Introduction deals with the nature, importance and scope of the subject. Sources are also discussed.

Chapter I outlines the history of snake cult in Ancient India.

Chapter II traces the socio-religious background of Bengal from the 8th - 12th centuries - a period when Manasā evolved and found a foothold in Bengali society. Chapter III narrates the stories of Manasā written in Bengali, Assamese and Bihari, and found in the Purāṇas. A comparative study and analysis of those stories is made which helps us to stratify the stories broadly into two categories - secular stories, some associated with divinities, and epic and Purāṇic stories.

Chapter IV on the original location and historicity of the principal legend of Manasā contains two parts. Part I, dealing with the original location, is divided into three sections - (i) discussion on local traditions and on the claims in favour of Bihar, South India and West

Bengal as either the residence of the legendary hero Chāndo or the place of origin of the legend and the cult, (ii) analysis on those points and (iii) consideration of the arguments which favour the claim of West Bengal, as the early home of the legend. Attempts are made here to ascertain the periods of the origin of the goddess and of the various stories of Manasā.

Chapter V traces the gradual evolution of the cult of Manasā. The goddess who had her origin among the lower class people, gradually found a place for herself, first among upper class women and then men. Her worship by the Muslims is recorded in the texts.

Chapter VI deals with the relations between Manasā and other cult-divinities. We have concluded that the hostility between Chandī and Manasā found in Manasākāvyas reflects an earlier stratum of religious history than that between Siva and Manasā or Siva and Chandī.

Chapter VII examines the icons said to be of Manasā and considers the views that Manasā originated out of Sarasvatī, Jāngulī, Padmāvatī, Kālī and other deities. These points are discussed and elucidated with charts at the end of this chapter.

Chapter VIII on the rites and ceremonies connected with Manasā contains two parts. Part I deals with the periods, days, methods, places and purposes of the worship of the goddess in Bengal, Tripura, Assam and Bihar. Part II describes the vratas (rites) and festivals of Manasā. It is also shown how the principal legend has served as an object of folk entertainments for some centuries down to the present day.

Summary and Conclusion briefly reviews the whole work and the main conclusions reached in it. There are five short appendices on (i) the poets of Manasākāvya, (ii) different names and epithets of Manasā, (iii) equivalent English months in relation to Bengali months, (iv) a specimen of a questionnaire and (v) approximate percentage of worshippers. The work also contains 31 illustrations with separate notes on each and a map of Eastern India.

A C K N O W L E D G E M E N T S

In the course of preparing this thesis I have received encouragement and help from several of my friends and scholars, and I wish to express my thanks to them. My sincere gratitude and respect should go first to my learned teacher Professor A.L. Basham, without whose constant help, guidance, encouragement and sympathy this work would not have been possible. I am also indebted to him as he suggested me to investigate this problem. I must next express my gratitude and indebtedness to Mr. T.W. Clark, Reader in Bengali at the School of Oriental and African Studies who took keen interest in the subject and made valuable suggestions. I am also grateful to Dr. S.K. Das of the Bengali Department of this School, who with his criticism and suggestions, was a source of help and inspiration. I am also thankful to Dr. J.G. de Casparis who suggested a few improvements on the first chapter of my thesis. I am indebted to Miss P. Misra for taking pains in reading with me my Sanskrit materials. I am grateful to Dr. N.C. Ganguli, M.B., B.S., and Miss A. Basu who have helped me in the preparation of my plates and map respectively. I must also acknowledge the help of my cousin Dr. S.K. Maity

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26.11.62.

Pradyot Kumar Maity

# ABBREVIATIONS

A.B.O.R.I.	Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute.
A.R.A.S.I.	Annual Report, Archaeological Survey of India.
A.S.W.I.	Archaeological Survey of Western India.
B.D.G.	Bengal District Gazetteers.
B.M.K.I.	<u>Bāṅglā Maṅgal Kāvya Itihāsa</u> by Bhattacharya, A.
B.S.O.A.S.	Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies.
Behulā-Vishaharī	Published and printed by Dudhnāth Pustakālay, Calcutta, 1956.
Catalogue of V.R.S.	A Catalogue of the Archaeological Relics in the Museum of the Varendra Research Society, Compiled by Basak, R.G. and Bhattacharya, D.C.
E.R.E.	<u>Encyclopaedia of Religion and Ethics</u> , Ed. Hastings, J.
History of Bengal	<u>History of Bengal</u> , Vol. 1. Ed. Majumdar, R.C.
Vol.1.	
H.B.L.L.	<u>History of Bengali Language and Literature</u> by Sen, D.C.
H.C.I.P.	The History and Culture of the Indian People, Ed. Majumdar, R.C. and Pusalkar, A.D.

I.A.	The Indian Antiquary.
I.C.	Indian Culture.
I.H.Q.	Indian Historical Quarterly.
J.A.R.S.	Journal of the Assam Research Society.
J.A.S.B.	Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal.
J.B.O.R.S.	Journal of the Bihar and Orissa Research Society.
J.R.A.S.	Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society.
Ketakādās	Ketakādās-Kshemānanda, <u>Manasā-Maṅgal</u> , Part I. Ed. Bhattacharya, J.M.
L.B.S.P.	Letter from the Baṅgiya Sāhitya Parisat, Bishnupur Branch, Bankura.
L.No.	Letter number of a completed questionnaire by an informant.
Manasā-Kāvya	(A collection of the works of Manakar and Durgābar) Ed. Barua, B.K. and Sarma, S.N.
M.A.S.I.	Memoirs of the Archaeological Survey of India.
New I.A.	New Indian Antiquary,
O.H.R.J.	Orissa Historical Research Journal.

Q.J.M.S.

Quarterly Journal of the Mythic  
Society.

Supp.List, V.R.S.M.

Supplementary List supplied from  
Varendra Research Society Museum,  
Rajshahi, on 16.3.61 by Chakrabarti,  
D.K., Asst. Curator.

S.P.P.

Sāhitya Parisat Patrikā.

S.P.P.R.

Sāhitya Parisat Patrikā, Rangpur.



## NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

The following system has been used:-

(i) For Bengali letters

অ	a	জ	jh
আ	ā	ঞ	ñ
ই	i	ট	t
ঈ	ī	ঠ	th
উ	u	ড	d
ঊ	ū	ঢ	dh
ঋ	ri	ণ	n
এ	e	ত	t
ঐ	ai	থ	th
ও	o	দ	d
ঔ	au	ধ	dh
ক	k	ন	n
খ	kh	প	p
গ	g	ফ	ph
ঘ	gh	ব	b
ঙ	ñ	ভ	bh
চ	ch	ম	m
ছ	chh	য	y
জ	j	র	r

अ l  
 ँ v  
 ञ s  
 श sh  
 स s  
 ह h

ङ r  
 ण rh  
 य y  
 ण m  
 ङ h  
 न n

(ii) For Devanāgarī letters

अ a  
 आ ā  
 इ i  
 ई ī  
 उ u  
 ऊ ū  
 ए e  
 ऐ ai  
 ओ o  
 औ au  
 क k  
 ख kh  
 ग g  
 घ gh

ङ n  
 च ch  
 छ chh  
 ज j  
 झ jh  
 ञ ñ  
 ट t  
 ठ th  
 ड d  
 ढ dh  
 प p  
 त t  
 थ th  
 द d  
 ध dh

न n	व v
प p	श ś
फ ph	ष sh
ब b	स s
भ bh	ह h
म m	ॠ ṛ
य y	ऌ ḷ
र r	ॡ ṡ
ल l	

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## I N T R O D U C T I O N

### 1. Nature and importance of the subject

The present work is an attempt to trace the early history and evolution of the snake goddess Manasā. This study throws much light on some features of the socio-cultural history of the country, one of whose most important aspects is religion. The importance of such history, whether of a nation, a race or a tribe, has been well emphasized throughout the world since the late 19th century. This social and cultural history falls within the scope of cultural historians, anthropologists and sociologists, who differ in their approaches. In India, though some pioneer studies date from the late 19th century, it was only in comparatively recent years that serious work on a large scale has been carried out by historians.

The materials for socio-cultural history which we find in the Brahmanical texts are one-sided. The traits of the culture traced in those texts are those of the culture of the upper classes. Nothing or very little is said on the beliefs, rites, amusements and other aspects of the daily life of the common people. Even the part played by them in the evolution of Indian culture is not sufficiently known.

It is stated by an American historian that the Americans have been suffering from the same lacuna in their knowledge of the cultural rôle of the "statistically numerous, nondominant groups."<sup>1</sup>

Though the necessity of writing such history has been felt in India, much remains to be done in the study of the culture of the people. The lack of sufficient materials might restrain us from studying the culture of the people of the ancient period, but materials for the centuries from the early mediaeval period to the present day are not lacking. Until the history of the great bulk of population is written, the full picture of a country's civilization cannot properly be assessed. This has been realised by scholars all over the world, and the output of work on the history of the common people continues to increase.

It is observed: "For any true understanding of American cultural development, the writing and study of American local history<sup>2</sup> is of primary importance. There lie the grass roots of American civilization... American history in the past has been written from the top down, an approach feasible

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1. Caroline, F. Ware (Ed.), The Cultural Approach to History, p.277.
  2. On the word local the author comments: "Obviously 'locality' may be interpreted with considerable elasticity. Any community having clear geographical or cultural unity, however extensive in areas, may come within the terms of any reasonable definition". (C.F.Ware, op.cit., p.276).

enough as long as scholars were content to write only political and diplomatic history. But the necessity of studying American life from the bottom up becomes obvious for the cultural historian".<sup>1</sup> Our objective in this work is not to study from the top down but from the bottom up. Thus it aims to trace the belief of the common people among whom the goddess Manasā had her origin in 9th-10th centuries A.D. in Bengal and later on, spread in Assam and Bihar.

## II. Scope of the subject

The history of the goddess Manasā is an almost unexplored and uninvestigated field of study and is confined to comparatively brief references in a few works. D.C. Sen's History of Bengali Language and Literature<sup>2</sup> and some works in Bengali<sup>3</sup> devote a few pages to her, but there the subject is treated in connection with the study of mediaeval Bengali literature. The first attempt to treat the subject systematically was that of N.K. Bhattasali in his Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum<sup>4</sup> but his work suffers from lapses. The next important move has been taken by A. Bhattacharya who in his Bāṅglā Maṅgal

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1. C.F. Ware, op.cit., p.275 (our italics)

2. D.C.Sen, op.cit., pp.252-276.

3. D.C.Sen, Bāṅga Bhāṣā O Sāhitya, pp.106-117; Bāṅga Sāhitya Parichaya, Part 1, Intro. pp.19-21 and pp.172-174.

4. N.K. Bhattasali, op.cit., pp.218-226.



Kāvyer Itihās<sup>1</sup> furnishes some more information relating to the goddess, against the general background of serpent worship in India. Though his book primarily deals with the history of the mediaeval literature written in honour of the popular deities of Bengal, the importance of his contribution cannot be minimised. His work, no doubt, adds much to the previous knowledge of the subject. However, many of his conclusions are confusing. In the Introduction and Notes of Bipradās' Manasā Bijay<sup>2</sup> Sukumar Sen has attempted to throw fresh light on the subject.

References to the goddess and the methods of her worship may also be found in the published district records<sup>3</sup> and other published works<sup>4</sup>. Besides these a few articles

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1. A.Bhattacharya, op.cit., pp.160-220.
  2. S.Sen.(Ed). op.cit., Intro.pp.i-xliv, & pp.293-310.
  3. L.S.S.O'Malley, B.D.G. Bankura, p.51; Birbhum, p.33; Hooghly, p.104; 24 Parganas, pp.71-72; L.L.S. O'Malley and M.M. Chakravarty, B.D.G.: Howrah, pp.43-44; J.C.K. Peterson, B.D.G.: Burdwan, pp.55-56; E.A.Sachse, B.D.G.: Mymensingh, p.36; H.Coupland, B.D.G.: Manbhum, p.94; J.C.Jack, B.D.G.: Bakarganj, p.36; J.N. Gupta, Eastern Bengal & Assam District Gazetteers: Bogra, p.38; J.F.Gruning: Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Jalpaiguris, p.32; J.A. Vas, Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Rangpur, p.45; J.E. Webster, Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers: Noakhali p.35.
  4. W.J.Wilkins, Modern Hinduism, pp.225-226; H.H.Risley, The Tribes and Castes of Bengal, Vol.I, pp.41,80,84,187,227,270,290,454,457,498,499,509,517,523; Vol.II, pp.23,42,49,264; J.Ph.Vogel, Indian Serpent Lore, p.278; E.R.E.Vol.XI, p.413; History of Bengal Vol.I, pp.460-461; P.L.Paul, The Early History of Bengal, Vol.II, p.106; B.A.Gupte, Hindu Holidays and Ceremonies, pp.140-144; B. Barua, A Cultural History of Assam, Vol.1, pp.141,193-195; N.R.R. Bāṅgālir Itihās, (Adi parva), pp.588-589; T.C.Das Gupta, Prāchin Bāṅglā Sahityer Itihās, pp.91-100; S.Sen, Bāṅglā Sāhityer Itihās pp.91-100; S.Sen, Bāṅglā Sāhityer Itihās, Vol.1, pp.109-113; P.C.

/over

published in different Bengali and English journals have been utilized in course of our investigation. The work which has so far been done is in no way sufficient to reconstruct the history of the goddess. Moreover the materials have not been properly explored and very little has been done to study the subject historically and scientifically.

Our aim, therefore, is to find out new facts and to reconstruct a fuller history of the goddess, based on a reasonable interpretation of the sources. Of course to produce positive conclusions we cannot avoid making inferences and hypotheses in some cases in dealing with a period of which the materials are not sufficient.

### III. Sources

(1) Folklore Materials - As our study depends primarily on the folklore materials, a short introduction is necessary on the meaning, nature and importance of folklore in the field of socio-cultural history.

The word "folklore" was first coined in 1846 by the English scholar William J. Thomas to replace the earlier expression "popular antiquities". The scientific term

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Footnote 4 continued from previous page

Chaudhury, The History of Civilisation of the People of Assam, pp.372,419,457,498; Swami Sankarananda, Manasa Charit; pp.1-152; E.O.James, The Cult of the Mother Goddess, p.119; M.Ghose, Bāṅglā Sahitya, pp.68-69.

was quickly adopted by scholars of other countries and finally became internationally accepted. Different definitions and uses of the term have been given by different scholars at different times<sup>1</sup> but broadly speaking it consists of "the beliefs, customs, superstitions, proverbs, riddles, songs, myths, legends, tales, ritualistic ceremonies, magic, witchcrafts, and all other manifestations and practices of primitive and illiterate peoples and of the 'common' people of civilized society."<sup>2</sup>

The term folklore was first used "to denote only the materials included in the scope of this study; later on, it was frequently used to designate also the branch of science which devotes itself to the study of the material."<sup>3</sup> It is explained by an eminent folklorist: "The science of folklore is an historical science, historical because it seeks to throw light on man's past; a science because it endeavours (sic) to attain this goal not by speculation or deduction from some a priori principal, but by the inductive method used in all scientific research."<sup>4</sup>

Nowadays it is accepted that folklore helps us in the

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1. Maria Leach and Others (Ed.), Standard Dictionary of Folklore Mythology and Legend, Vol.1, pp.398-403.
  2. Ibid., p.399; Cf., Ibid., pp.398,399; C.S.Burne, The Handbook of Folklore, p.1.
  3. A.Y.M.S. Sokolov, Russian Folklore, p.3.
  4. Maria Leach, op.cit., p.403.

fields of ethnology, pre-history, modern natural science, psychical research, abnormal psychology and religion.<sup>1</sup>

But it is further believed: "Even more intimate is the connection of folklore and religion, more particularly the so-called natural, i.e., non-dogmatic, non-revealed and usually but imperfectly organised, religions of the semi-civilised and of classical antiquity, but to a certain extent also the great monotheistic religions (Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Buddhism). ... In virtually all known religions a constant strife has been known to be going on between those desirous of reducing the folklore element to the very minimum, considering it incompatible with their concept of true religion, and those others claiming that, while a religion thus purged of the popular element may serve well enough the needs of select spirits, the educated, it will never satisfy the people."<sup>2</sup>

B.A. Botkin writes: "If we admitted no impediments to a marriage of true minds between folklore and history, the product of their union would be folk history ... a history, also, in which the people are the historians as well as the history, telling their own story in their own words -

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1. Ibid., pp.403-404.

2. Maria Leach, op.cit., p.404; For details see Prof. E.O.James' article, The Influence of Folklore on the History of Religion (Nyman, Vol.IX, Fasc.I, January 1962, pp.1-16).

Everyman's history, for Everyman to read."<sup>1</sup> He further believes that folklore and social history are "inextricably bound up with each other, and are not simply common ground but one and the same ground."<sup>2</sup> Thus folklore materials are of great importance to us as a source of socio-cultural history.

Bengal has ever been a fruitful soil for the growth and development of folklore and for its study. Folk poetry, a branch of it, whether written or unwritten, as found in most of the villages of Bengal serves as important source material for the study of the early mediaeval culture of Bengal. The historical value of folk poetry has been enthusiastically emphasized by Western scholars,<sup>3</sup> but in Bengal a few scholars have contributed in this field.<sup>4</sup> Except in the works of some of these scholars, the socio-cultural approach to the subject has not been taken into consideration by historians of Bengal.

It is observed that folklore records "an expression of genuine desires, aspirations, genius, emotions and thoughts of a people. A reconstruction of the early history

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1. C.F. Ware, op.cit., p.308.

2. Ibid., p.314.

3. Sokolov, op.cit., pp.35-39.

4. Among these H.P. Sastri, Lal Behari De, Rabindranath Tagore, D.C. Sen, Gurusaday Datta, D.R.Majumdar, A.N.Tagore deserve special mention.

and civilization of Bengal is only possible by a critical study of the folklore, folk rites and practices which prevail even today in different parts of the country."<sup>1</sup>

Prof. D.C. Ganguly writes that "the general character of folk culture which has developed in our villages is simplicity, sincerity, sensibility to human needs; and a general background of spiritual thinking without any complicated philosophical speculation. It is also marked by a childish love of nature and a childish love of God - though frequently expressed in very crude and superstitious irrational forms".<sup>2</sup> This observation of Prof. Ganguly can be well illustrated from the study of the mediaeval literature of Bengal.

Thus bearing in mind the importance of folk poetry and other folklore materials, especially in the field of religion, an attempt is made to study the history of the folk goddess Manasā by utilizing these materials. Bengal has a vast folk literature of narrative poems dealing mostly with the stories of the gods and goddesses; many of these poems had their origin between the 10th - 13th centuries of our era. One of chief subjects of this popular poetry is the goddess of our present study, about whom a considerable literature grew

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1. Man in India, Vol.32, No.4.p.209.

2. Indian Folklore, Vol.1, No.2, 1956, p.4.

up in Bengal, and later on, in Assam. Different stories relating to Manasā have been treated by poets numbering about sixty,<sup>1</sup> from the 15th century or earlier up to the end of the 19th century. But our present study is mainly based on the versions of the 15th century Bengali poets - Bipradās,<sup>2</sup> Nārāyaṇ Deb<sup>3</sup> and Bijay Gupta<sup>4</sup> - and of the 17th century poets - Ketakādās,<sup>5</sup> Baṁśīdās<sup>6</sup> and Jagajjīban.<sup>7</sup> The versions of the 16th century poets of Assam<sup>8</sup> and of the published Bihari version<sup>9</sup> of the 20th century which is not based on any early manuscript, are also taken into consideration for comparative study of the stories of the three provinces.

The narrative poems which were composed to glorify the goddess, are important for more than one reason. Firstly, they give us a clear and vivid account of the growth and spread of the cult of Manasā in different strata of society and of the rites and rituals connected with her. Her non-Aryan

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1. D.C. Sen, H.B.L.L., pp. 276-294.

2. Bipradās: Manasā-Bijay, (Ed. by) Sukumar Sen.

3. Nārāyaṇ Deb: Padma-Puraṇ, (Ed. by) T.C. Dasgupta.

4. Bijay Gupta: Padma-Puraṇ, (Ed. by) B.K. Bhattacharya.

5. Ketakādās-Kshemānanda: Manasā-Maṅgal, (Ed. by) J.M. Bhattacharya.

6. Baṁśīdās Ray: Padmāpurāṇ, (Ed. by) Ramanath Chakravarty and Dvarakanath Chakravarty.

7. Jagajjīban: Manasāmaṅgal, (Ed. by) S.C. Bhattacharya and A. Das.

8. Manasā-Kāvya, (Ed. by) B.K. Barua and S.N. Sarma.

9. Bihulā-Vishaharī (New Edition), Pub. and printed by Dudhnāth Pustakalaya.

origin as a local deity, her struggle to make a place for herself in upper class homes which led her to face a long struggle with the worshippers of Siva as represented by Chāndo and her final triumph, can be well traced from these poems. Secondly, they throw considerable light on the social life of the country where the poems were composed. Details of the marriage of Behulā and Lakhindar from its beginning with the search for a suitable bride to the actual marriage ceremony, superstitions regarding omens and auspicious days, customs of entertainment, food, especially that of the pregnant women, dress, ornaments, peculiar festivals, trade and commerce, and other aspects of the mediaeval society of Bengal and Assam are vividly depicted in these poems.

Lastly, they represent the specimens of both the vernacular languages and literatures of Bengal and Assam which help to trace their growth and development.

In a word these songs contain a mine of information, though we concentrate on exploring those materials which help us to trace the history of the goddess Manasā.

Referring to the difficulties of using these folklore materials T.W. Clark observes that "none of the manuscripts we now possess are originals, for the poems were handed down in oral tradition for many generations, and were not in many



cases committed to writing until as late as the 18th or even the 19th century, during which interval it is safe to assume that material alterations were made; and ... the authors were not writing of contemporary life and worship, but of periods preceding their own by three, four or even more centuries."<sup>1</sup>

(2) Field Survey Method - More than twenty years ago it was observed by C.M. Green that a historian who desires to write a local history may well employ field study techniques either by questionnaire or by interview,<sup>2</sup> but the application of the survey method in the field of socio-cultural research is of comparatively recent development in India. We have made a local survey through questionnaire answered by schoolmasters and others throughout West Bengal. Out of this survey we have been able to collect a mass of materials on the present day popularity of the goddess and the rites and ceremonies connected with her. It is interesting to note that many of the rites and ceremonies which are referred to in the early versions are still current in Bengal. This field investigation has helped us to draw positive conclusions on many aspects of the cult.

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1. B.S.O.A.S., 1955, XVII/3 pp.503f.

2. C.F. Ware, op.cit., p.280.

Thus the use of folklore materials and the result of field investigation have enabled us to examine the subject thoroughly. This new approach to the subject has not been followed by previous students of the cult.

We have also utilized contemporary works of the Sanskrit literature, where some references to the goddess have been made. We hope this study will be of some interest to all students of the history, literature and religion of Bengal and the adjoining states in particular, and to the students of religion and anthropology in general.

## CHAPTER I

### Serpent Worship in Ancient India

#### 1. Introductory

Ophiolatry is an ancient cult not only among the Indians but among many other races of the world.<sup>1</sup> The serpent was held in almost universal veneration in ancient times. In the early days of civilization, a special reverence seems to have been given to two classes of animals, the first comprising dangerous and strong animals such as the Lion, the Bull, the Horse, the Elephant, the Monkey and so on and the second containing mild and useful animals, such as the Cow, the Dog, the Dove and the Fish.<sup>2</sup> The snake, which belonged to the first group, has played a great rôle in the religious history of India from primeval times to the present day. The popularity of the cult is so great that "in no other part of the world is it more widely distributed or developed in more varied and interesting forms."<sup>3</sup>

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1. Fergusson, Tree and Serpent Worship, pp.1-64; C.S.Wake, Serpent Worship, and other Essays, pp.81-106; J.Lubbock, The Origin of Civilisation and the Primitive Condition of Man, pp. 268-275; E.R.E., Vol. XI, pp.399-422.
  2. Wake, op.cit., pp.273-274; W.Crooke, Natives of Northern India, p.242.
  3. E.R.E., Vol.XI, pp.411-412.

It might be suggested that the concept of a deity and the idea of the adoration of either a natural object such as the Sun, the Moon, a river or a particular animal were perhaps the outcome of two primitive instincts - fear and wonder. In every early society some of the chief objects of worship seem to have been either natural phenomena or animals.<sup>1</sup>

Early man lived either in forests or in caves, where he had to face or fight with ferocious animals, and many men must have lost their lives either by the attacks of wild beasts or by the venomous bites of snakes. This fatal consequence led in the savage almost irresistibly to "the notion of something divine according to his notions of divinity."<sup>2</sup> There are other characteristics of snakes which gave some momentum to this belief. The sudden disappearance of a snake in the undergrowth, the brilliance and fascination of its eye, its beauty and strength, its enveloping folds, its supportless body, its way of living in holes for a long time without food, and its property of casting its skin led people to worship the reptile, which seemed almost or completely immortal. Thus fear coupled

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1. M Crooke, Natives of Northern India, p. 242

2. Lubbock, op.cit., p. 268.

with wonder brought about the worship of the snake all over the world, as a single snake, or as a species, or by creating a serpent god or goddesses, or by worshipping the heroes of the particular race which used snakes either as its totem or tribal emblem. Totemism may not be the only cause of worshipping the serpent, but it seems to have served as an impetus to some peoples to revere the snake as their special deity.<sup>1</sup>

The forces tending to the creation of a deity or a belief, have been clearly pointed out by Prof. E.O. James: "The pressing events in the external world and in the immediate circle of human relationships, the struggle for existence and survival, the innumerable daily frustrations and our inspiring experiences, often completely outside human control and beyond comprehension; above all the ceaseless preoccupation with the means of subsistence and continuance of the species - these were and are the causes and occasions of the emotional situation out of which rite and belief have emerged."<sup>2</sup> This was partly true in the case of the worship of the serpent which, at first the mere object of fear, came to be a universally revered divinity.

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1. E.R.E., Vol. XI, p.399.

2. E.O. James, The Concept of Deity, p.17.

Several theories have been put forward to account for the origin of ophiolatry in India. Many of these, though interesting, would receive little support from modern scholars. A few scholars have asserted that serpent worship as an organised cult had its origin among the Scythians of Central Asia, who spread it throughout the world.<sup>1</sup> They were in the habit of using the serpent as a national symbol.<sup>2</sup> In this connection it has also been suggested that the Proto-Dravidians who came to India spoke a language similar to that of Scythians by which, in modern terminology, was meant the Finno Ugrian family of languages.<sup>3</sup> This view originated with the 19th century authority on Dravidian languages Caldwell, and is still held by Professor T. Burrow of Oxford. On the other hand S.C.Roy and others have suggested that the Proto-Dravidians were early immigrants of the Mediterranean race and that they contributed the snake cult in India.<sup>4</sup>

Thus the theories regarding the origin and the spread of the cult are at variance and none can be accepted with certainty; moreover we have already seen that animal

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1. C.S. Wake, op.cit., p.106; E.R.E., Vol.XI, p.412.

2. Q.J.M.S., Vol. 16, p.193; E.R.E., Vol.XI, p.412.

3. E.J.Rapson, (Ed.), The Cambridge History of India, p.594; Q.J.M.S., Vol. 16.

4. Proceedings and Transactions of 7th All-India Oriental Conference, 1935, pp.203ff; Q.J.M.S., Vol.16, p.199.

worship was widely prevalent in every early society of the human world. The claim of the Scythians cannot stand for two reasons - firstly, that the theory that they brought snake worship to India depends only on superficial similarities between Dravidian and Finno-Ugrian languages, and there is no historical evidence for an invasion of Central Asians before the Aryans; secondly, there is no trace of the general cult of the serpent in Central Asia except the use of the snake as an ornament or symbol.<sup>1</sup> Lubbock believed in the independent local origin of serpent worship at different places and times, arising naturally out of the common instincts of terror, fear and wonder at the activities and apparently supernatural power of the reptile.<sup>2</sup> Similarly Frazer's maxim that "homogeneity of belief" shows "homogeneity of race"<sup>3</sup> is rejected by A.C. Haddon on the ground that common beliefs and practices may have independent origins, due to the fundamental and essential uniformity of human thought and imagination.<sup>4</sup> In the present state of our knowledge the theory of the local origin of snake cults in various parts of the world seems to be the firmest based and to carry most conviction. Thus "primitive religious

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1. E.R.E., Vol. XI, p.412.

2. Lubbock, op.cit., p.269.

3. Q.J.M.S., Vol. 16, p.197.

4. Haddon, The Wanderings of Peoples, p.10.

characteristics are human, not racial."<sup>1</sup>

## II. The snake cult in art and literature

The practice of serpent worship in India may be traced back to the Harappa culture of the Indus Valley. The Mohenjo-daro seals and pottery have thrown much light on the religious life of the people, and on their attitude towards the serpent. On the obverse of a seal<sup>2</sup> is a figure, believed to be a prototype of the historical Siva of the Hindu pantheon, seated on a dais, attended on either side by a kneeling devotee. Behind each of the devotees is depicted the vertical figure of a cobra. There are other seals,<sup>3</sup> which represent snakes in association with trees. The use of the snake in seals leads us to believe that the veneration to the reptile was current among the people of the Harappa culture as it is even today in India, where an orthodox Hindu refrains from killing snakes as it is popularly believed that any injury caused to them will bring on leprosy, sterility or ophthalmia.<sup>4</sup> The widespread nature of the present belief suggests its antiquity. From the seal which we have described it appears

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1. Hopkins, The History of Religions, p.16.
  2. J.Marshall, Mahenjo-Daro and the Indus Civilization, Vol.II, p.395, Figs. pl. cxvi-No.29, pl.cxviii, No.11.
  3. A.P. Karmarkar, The Religions of India, Vol.1, p.190.
  4. E.Thurston, Ethnographic Notes in Southern India, p.285.



that either the cobra was used as an emblem of Proto-Siva or it was the totem of devotees who worshipped the god of our seal. It has been suggested that these devotees belonged to a tribe known as Nāga, probably totemistic. The tribes of more recent times who bear the same name of Nāga will be discussed later.

There are a few pieces of pottery which also show that respect was paid to the snake. Pictured figures of a cobra, in some cases with expanded hood and attendant cobras behind the worshippers, as seen in our seal, are found on these pots.<sup>1</sup> From the archaeological evidence, the only source for that period, most scholars would support the existence of some kind of snake cult in the Proto-Indian period.<sup>2</sup>

Indian literature, such as the Vedas, the Mahābhārata, the Purāṇas, the Jātakas and other religious books, is full

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1. E.J.H. Mackay, Further Excavations at Mohenjo-Daro, Vol.1, pp.359, 360,362.
  2. Fergusson, Tree and Serpent Worship, p.244; Marshall, op.cit., Vol.II, p.395; J.N.Banerjea, The Development of Hindu Iconography, p.345; A.P. Karmarkar, op.cit., p.159; A.C.Bouquet, Comparative Religion, p.121. L.B.Kenya's article, The Nagas in Magadha contains some useful information but the scholar has failed to distinguish the Nāgas and the Nāga cult. According to him snake worship was not prevalent before the Mauryan period, though all other scholars are unanimous on its existence from the earliest period of our history (J.B.O.R.S., Vol. 28, pp.160ff).

of references to the Nāgas as well as to the cult of snakes.<sup>1</sup> Among the early inhabitants of India there was a powerful tribe or group of tribes generally known as Nāgas. Their importance may be gathered from their distribution in many parts of India, as well as outside the country.<sup>2</sup> The identity of the term applied to a snake as well as to a man of a particular tribe led both ancient authors and later historians to confuse the two. It is often suggested that the tribes of snake worshippers were called Nāgas by the Aryans, either from their worship of the snake or from their use of the snake as a totem.<sup>3</sup>

Some scholars are of the opinion that, at the time of the Aryan invasion, South India was inhabited by a number of tribes such as Dasyus, Rākshasas, Vānaras, Yakshas, Sabaras and Nāgas, who had their own culture and civilisation, no less advanced than those of the invaders.<sup>4</sup> Even the

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1. For details see Vogel, Indian Serpent Lore.
  2. T.K.Krishna Menon, Dravidian Culture and its Diffusion, pp.79ff; Proceedings of the Third Indian History Congress, 1939, p.215; J.B.O.R.S., Vol.28, p.152; N.K.Bhattachali, Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum, p.214; T.A.Gopinath Rao, Elements of Hindu Iconography, Vol.II, Part 2; According to Father Heras' reading of the Indus seals, Nāga tribes were widespread even in the days of the Harappa culture; but his readings are not accepted except by a few of his former students such as A.P.Karmarkar (Karmarkar, op.cit., pp.6-7).
  3. C.F. Oldham, The Sun and the Serpent, p.47; Atkinson, Himalayan Districts of N.W.Provinces, Vol.2, pp. 373ff; E.R.E. Vol.XI, p.414.
  4. Proc. and Trans. 7th All India Oriental Conference, 1935, p. 244; Krishna Menon, op.cit., p.1.

Buddhist Mahāvamsa tells us that a Yaksha tribe succeeded to the Rākshasas' Kingdom, a part of which was conquered by the Nāgas.<sup>1</sup> There is no sharp line of demarcation between a nāga (snake) and a Nāgarāja in our early literature. We are told frequently that a Nāga king is a snake who occasionally assumes human form.

Fergusson asserts that the Nāgas were not originally snakes but snake worshippers.<sup>2</sup> This view is supported by Oldham, who argues that they were not demons or monsters, as depicted by the Brāhmaṇas, but people who claimed descent from the Sun and used the hooded serpent as a totem.<sup>3</sup> Oldenburg suggests that the Nāgas belong to that class of demonic beings which is best represented in the West by the were-wolves.<sup>4</sup> Certainly it was believed in Ancient India that the Nāga was a supernatural snake spirit who could assume human form at will, but this does not account for all the data concerning the Nāgas. The confusion between the race and the totem or emblem seems to have led to some of this tradition, and we agree that "the Indian serpent legends are but a memory surviving in an ignorant and super-

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1. Ibid., p.248; Krishna Menon, op.cit., p.3.

2. Fergusson, Tree and Serpent Worship, p.248.

3. Oldham, op.cit., pp.31ff.

4. Vogel, Indian Serpent Lore, p.2; Karmarkar, op.cit., p.158.

stitious peasantry of an old life struggle between the Aryan population and the perhaps aboriginal Nāga peoples, whose totem, so to speak, or even merely national fighting emblem or standard, has, it may be, become confused with the race."<sup>1</sup>

Thus the Aryāns had to fight with early inhabitants among whom the Nāgas played a great rôle. Oldham believes that the tribes who opposed the Aryans were the tribes of Serpent race and that they are referred to as the Asuras, Nāgas and Sarpas in early literature.<sup>2</sup> This view is supported by other scholars who believe that these apparently mythical beings were "a strongly gifted race of actual men".<sup>3</sup>

Fergusson denies the existence of snake worship among the Aryans and believes that any reference to it in the later Vedas or any other early literature of the Aryans is an interpolation or a concession to the vanquished.<sup>4</sup> Though Fergusson's book is a storehouse of information regarding the snake cult in India as well as in the ancient world generally, this remark is proved fallacious by a further examination of the writings of the Aryans on which Fergusson relied. The snake cult was so widely prevalent among the Proto-Indians that it was impossible for the invaders to get

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1. I.A., Vol.29, p.90; cf., Wheeler, The History of India, Vol.1, pp.146-147.
  2. Oldham, The Sun and the Serpent, pp.31f.
  3. J.B.O.R.S., Vol.28, p.62; cf., Man in India, Vol.26, p.53.
  4. Fergusson, Tree and Serpent Worship, p.61.

rid of the deeply rooted beliefs and practices of the vanquished. So they allowed and adopted it to a certain extent as a subordinate religious cult.<sup>1</sup>

Though the Rigveda yields no certain reference, in the later Vedas ample references are made to charms against snake bite, to the idea of the snake as guardian, and other topics connected with snake worship. A.P.Karmarkar has put forward the opinion that the introduction of the Indra-Vritra myth was the first step in the Aryanization of the snake cult of the conquered by the conquerors.<sup>2</sup> He believes: "This myth is a pure creation of the Vedic Aryans, probably innovated as a denotation of their distastefulness (sic) or abhorrence of the custom of serpent veneration as practised by the indigenous peoples of India ... Indra was their mighty lord, and if he was to destroy the leaders and armies of the heroic peoples of India - the so called Dāsas, Dasyus and Asuras, he must also do so in the case of their gods also."<sup>3</sup>

A careful study of the Vedic hymns shows that Vritra, one of the most powerful enemies of Indra and Devas was

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1. Hopkins, The History of Religions, p.209; Macdonell, A History of Sanskrit Literature, p.182; I.A., Vol.7, p.43; Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol.II, p.217.

2. Karmarkar, op.cit., p.159.

3. Ibid.

represented as an Asura, a Dasyu and a Dānava and was also of the serpent race of Ahi.<sup>1</sup> Vritra is designated Ahi or serpent.<sup>2</sup> We are told that in the Rigveda the term Ahi is applied to the Asuras or Dasyus.<sup>3</sup> There are many hymns in the Vedas which mention Ahi<sup>4</sup> or Arbuda<sup>5</sup>, as an enemy of Indra and the Devas; these enemies are also styled Asuras and Dasyus. Arbuda is designated as a snake.<sup>6</sup> Even in the Veda we have reference of Ahirbudhnya,<sup>7</sup> the Dragon of the Deep, who is also referred to as Ahi.<sup>8</sup> Thus it seems clear from the Vedic references that the Asuras, Dasyus, Dānavas and so forth represent the early tribes of India who opposed the Aryans. If the invaders tried to eradicate the deeply rooted early practice of snake worship from the minds of the conquered their attempts ended in failure, as is evident from the later Vedic hymns where snakes are addressed and worshipped.<sup>9</sup> Though the Aryans

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1. Rigveda, I.32.11ff., II. 11, 18-19. See Griffiths Hymns of the Rigveda, Vol.1, p.349 (commentary).
  2. Rigveda, I. 32. 11, II. 11. 5; For commentary Griffith's, Hymns of the Rigveda, Vol.1, pp.56f.
  3. Rigveda, I. 32. 11, Böhrtlingk and Roth, Lex., S.V.Ahi.
  4. Rigveda, I. 32. 11, I. 103. 2,7. I.130.4, II.13.5, II.19.2, II.30.1.
  5. Rigveda, I.51.6, II.11.20, II, 14.4.
  6. Böhrtlingk and Roth, Lex.
  7. Rigveda, IV.55.6, VI.49.11, VI.50.14, I.186.5, II.31.6, V.41.16.
  8. Ibid., X.64.4; For commentary Griffith's, Hymns of the Rigveda, Vol.IV,p.227.
  9. Atharvaveda, V.13,VI.12,VI.56,VII.56,VIII.7-8,XI.6,9; cf. Macdonell, Vedic Mythology, p.153; Macdonell, A History of Sanskrit Literature,p.182, Hopkins, op.cit., p.209.

may have opposed this practice at first, ultimately they assimilated the snake cult as a part of their religion.

In the later Hindu Śāstras there are ample references to the adoration of the snake. In the Grihyasūtras the propitiation of snakes is prescribed.<sup>1</sup> The Baudhāyana Grihyasūtra gives a detailed account of the Sarpabali, a ceremony which was observed for the purposes of honouring and warding off snakes. According to this sūtra (III.10.2) the rite is to be observed every year, every six months, every four months, every season or every month in the rainy season. But most of the sūtras prescribe that the rite should be performed on the full-moon day of the month of Śrāvaṇa. The Pāraskara Grihyasūtra prescribes that one who wishes the snakes not to enter a certain area, should go round that area three times, sprinkling an uninterrupted stream of water with the verses: "Drive away, O White one! with thy foot, with the fore-foot, with the hind-foot, these seven children of Varuṇa and all the daughters of the King's tribe. Within the dominion of the White one, the serpent has seen nobody. To the White one, the son of Viḍarva! Adoration! Svāhā!"<sup>2</sup> The Law book

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1. For the Grihyasūtras, see V.M. Apte, Social and Religious Life in the Grihyasūtras, pp.119-122; Ram Gopal, India of Vedic Kalpasūtras, pp.107-108, 391, 404ff, 469ff.
  2. Paraskara Grihyasūtra, II. 14.3-5 as quoted by V.M. Apte, op.cit., p.120.

of Vishnu lays down rules regarding the killing of snakes. If a man kills a snake "he must fast one day, and on the next day he must give a dish of milk, sesame and rice mixed together to a Brahman and give him an iron hoe as his fee."<sup>1</sup> It is also mentioned in the list of duties of a householder that respect should be paid to the serpent demons Taksha and Upataksa.<sup>2</sup> This evidence is enough to show that the snake cult was adopted by the Aryans.

The mythical origin of the Nāgas in the Mahābhārata deserves special mention in this connection. In the beginning, Prajāpati alone existed in this world and later on, after the creation of men and animals,<sup>3</sup> Kaśyapa inherited the position of Prajāpati and married his two beautiful daughters, Kadru and Vinatā. To each of his wives Kaśyapa wanted to give a boon. Kadru asked for a thousand snakes as sons of equal splendour, whereas Vinatā prayed for two sons who would be able to surpass the thousand sons of Kadru in strength, valour and beauty. Blessing both his wives Kaśyapa left his house and practised austerities. After a period of five hundred years Kadru

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1. The Institutes of Vishnu, S.B.E., p.160.

2. Ibid., p.212.

3. Mahābhārata, Ādi, 14.5ff, 20.1ff., 23.1ff., 25-31(Poona ed.)



bore a thousand eggs and from them snakes were hatched. Of these Sesha was born first, next Vāsuki, and then the others followed. But Vinatā bore only two eggs, from which Aruṇa, the charioteer of the Sun-god, and Garuḍa, the carrier of Viṣṇu emerged. Before the birth of the latter, Kadru laid a wager with Vinatā and won the bet by fraud. Her sons were forced to assist her in the fraud under pain of their mother's curse. Vinatā became a bondswoman, obeying the orders of Kaṛu. After his birth Garuḍa knew of his mother's suffering, met his cousins, and asked them how he could free her from bondage. They told him that she would be released if he brought amṛita for them. At this Garuḍa went away, and after facing much trouble, brought amṛita from heaven for the snakes and so released his mother from bondage. But unfortunately, when the snakes came home after performing certain rites, they found that the amṛita had been taken away by Śakra. At this Kadru blamed and cursed them!

Before the wager between Kadru and Vinatā took place, the sons of the former were famous for their prowess and valour. A few of them were asked for help by the gods at the time of the churning of the ocean. Once the celestials gathered together on the peak of Mt. Meru where they discussed the means of obtaining amṛita. This was noticed by Nārāyaṇa,

who told Brahmā that they would obtain the amṛita if they churned the ocean with the help of the Devas and the Asuras. He also suggested that they should use Mount Mandara as a churning staff, which they might tear from its base with the help of the powerful and pious snake Sesha,<sup>1</sup> who was commonly known as Ananta, "the Endless One". Instructed by Brahmā and Nārāyaṇa, Ananta uprooted the mountain with all that was upon it. Then the gods, accompanied by Ananta, went to the seashore and took the consent of the ocean before churning it. Another great serpent chief, Vāsuki, also assisted the gods. He was used as the cord, when Mount Mandara was made the churning-staff. The Asuras held Vāsuki by the hood and the gods held him by the tail. The churning was started and they continued until they obtained amṛita. Only the gods drank the amṛita, while the Asuras were deprived of it by fraud.<sup>2</sup>

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1. He was most famous among the sons of Kadru. The attitude of his mother to his sister and his cousin and her fraud were disliked by Sesha, who left the house and the company of his brothers and practised hard austerities, living upon air and rigidly observing vows. Pleased with his devotion, Brahmā appointed Sesha as the only supporter of the world. This legend is perhaps based on the fact that a powerful king of the Nāga tribe helped the Aryans against his neighbouring tribes (Mahābhārata, Ādi, 32.1ff. Poona ed.)
  2. Mahābhārata, Ādi, 15-18 (Poona ed.).

Another important tradition connected with snakes is the story of Parikshit. One day Parikshit, the ruler of Hastināpura, accompanied by a company of royal attendants, went out to hunt. While hunting, he shot an arrow at a deer, which ran away. The king followed the animal and finally the deer disappeared from sight. Now the king found himself alone and began to walk until he met an unnamed rishi who was practising austerities under a vow of silence. Fatigued by hunger and thirst the king enquired of the rishi about the missing deer, but the rishi remained silent, and thus aroused great anger in the king. After his repeated enquiry the king lost his patience and placed a dead snake, which was lying on the ground, on the shoulders of the rishi with the help of his bow. No opposition or reply came from the rishi. Then the king left the place and rejoined his attendants.

When Śringin, the son of the rishi, heard the news of the king's behaviour to his father, he cursed the king that he would be bitten by the snake Takshaka within a week. The rishi heard of the curse made by his son, and sent one of his disciples to king Parikshit so that he could take every precaution against the venomous bite of the great snake. But in spite of all precautions Takshaka

entered the palace in the guise of a Brahman on the seventh day and bit the king, who died on the spot.<sup>1</sup>

This story was told by the ministers to Janamejaya, the only son of Parikshit. The king was very moved and wanted to know how he might bring about the destruction of Takshaka and his people. This snake had once harrassed a Brahman named Uttanka, who also provoked Janamerjaya against Takshaka. The chief priest told the king of a sacrifice, prescribed by the gods, known as the snake-sacrifice. The king agreed to perform this and the snake-sacrifice was started. This news created great terror among the snakes, especially Takshaka. Takshaka took the help of Indra, who assured him of his life. Many snakes lost their lives, until finally the sacrifice was stopped by the intervention of a Brahman named Āstika, the nephew of the snake king Vāsuki. Āstika was the son of the mighty ascetic Jaratkāru who had married Jaratkāru, who bore the same name as himself and was the sister of Vāsuki, the king of the eastern Nāgas. Thus the remaining members of the race were saved.<sup>2</sup>

A.P. Karmarkar believes that the performance of the

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1. Ibid., Ādi. 36.8.-37 (Poona ed.)

2. Mahābhārata, Ādi. 46-53 (Poona ed.)

snake-sacrifice by Janamejaya was probably the next step to show the detestation of the Aryans for the Nāga cult.<sup>1</sup> He goes on to say that as the hero-god of the Aryans is made to kill Vṛitra in the Indra-Vṛitra myth, so also King Janamerjaya is made to start the snake-sacrifice.<sup>2</sup> To him both the myths represent the great abhorrence of the Aryans for the snake cult. But this sort of interpretation of the myth cannot stand, for simple reasons. Firstly, at the time of the snake-sacrifice the Vedic god Indra is represented as the defender and well-wisher of Takshaka, whose destruction was the sole aim of the Sacrifice. Secondly, we have shown that the Snake cult was adopted by the Aryans before the final compilation of the great epic:<sup>3</sup> In our opinion the snake-sacrifice seems to be a mythic representation of a particular event, the fight between an Aryan and a non-Aryan king, a worshipper of snakes, who, probably after a period of subjugation, revolted against Janamejaya.<sup>4</sup> Generally

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1. Karmarkar, op.cit., p.164.

2. Ibid.

3. It is believed that the present form of the Mahābhārata was completed before the 4th century A.D. its composition starting approximately from circa 600 B.C.

4. According to a Punjab folk tale King Parikshit abducted a daughter of Bāsak (Vāsuki) Nāg. This enraged the Nāga king who invaded Indraprastha and killed Parikshit. Days passed and finally Janamerjaya, the son of the slain king, took revenge by attacking the Nāgas, which led to the snake-sacrifice (Oldham, op.cit., p.58).

friendly relations had already been established between the Aryans and the non-Aryans at the time. This legendary sacrifice, offered by King Janamejaya for the destruction of the snakes, is recorded not only in the Mahābhārata but also in the Purāṇas and other allied works. The myth of the battle between Indra and Vṛitra, on the other hand, which is first recorded in the R̥gveda, is evidently much older, and has no very obvious similarities to the story of Janamejaya's snake-sacrifice; it has been suggested that the former legend owes something to the Babylonian creation-myth of the battle between Marduk and Tiamat.<sup>1</sup>

### III. Association of the snake cult with the different religious systems.

#### Saivism.

The snake cult is more closely related to Śiva than to any other deity of the Hindu pantheon. We have seen from the Mohenjo-daro seal that the snake seems to have been one of the emblems of "Proto-Śiva".<sup>2</sup> As the snake is commonly found as an ornament of Śiva, he is styled Nāgabhushaṇa, "the snake adorned one". Though snakes have been represented as the ornaments of many deities, as emblems of immortality, their association with Śiva

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1. A.L.Basham, The Wonder that was India, p.400.

2. Supra, p. 19



is more widely current.<sup>1</sup> Fergusson believes that the snake in this content represents a weapon or an implement of terror, and not an object of worship.<sup>2</sup> The latter statement at least is not true in the popular practice of the Saiva cult.

Siva is worshipped as a snake god at Nāgeśvar, in the form of a Nāga or cobra.<sup>3</sup> In a shrine of the Varanasi Palace of the Rajas of Nagpur, Siva is worshipped in the form of a coiled Nāga or cobra. Similar images exist in the old Mahādeo temples at Nagpur.<sup>4</sup> In the Nāga-Kuān or Serpent Well, near the city of Varanasi, there is a stone emblem of Mahādeo on which a snake is found crawling up. There is also a figure representing three snakes. People offer sacrifices on the 24th and 25th days of the month of Śrāvaṇa both to the Nāga Well and to Mahādeo as Nāgesvar or the Serpent god.<sup>5</sup> The date of the construction of the Well is not known, but it bears the stamp of considerable antiquity.<sup>6</sup> Snake wells are frequently found attached to the temples of Siva.<sup>7</sup>

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1. E.Moor, Hindu Pantheon, p.36; J.A.S.B. Vol.48, Part 1, p.21.

2. Fergusson, Tree and Serpent Worship, p.75.

3. J.A.S.B., Vol. 48, p.20.

4. Ibid., This and the preceding statement are taken from accounts of the last century. We may assume that they are still valid.

5. Fergusson, Tree and Serpent Worship, p.79; J.A.S.B., Vol.48, pp.21-22.

6. J.A.S.B., Vol. 48, p.22.

7. Ibid., p.23.

In Gujrat<sup>1</sup> and Konkan<sup>2</sup> snake images are still found in Siva temples, where people worship them daily along with the god Siva.

In the N.W. Himalayan districts Siva as Riksheśvar is known as the lord of the snakes and is surrounded by snakes and crowned with a chaplet of hooded snakes.<sup>3</sup>

In the Bhairava temple on the Lingūr peak, the god is represented by a coloured stick in the form of a hooded snake.<sup>4</sup>

In the Mahābhārata Siva is described as having a girdle of snakes, ear-rings of snakes, a upavita of a snake and an outer garment of snake's skin.<sup>5</sup> The serpent king Vāsuki is supposed to be slung round the neck of Siva.<sup>6</sup>

It is well known that in many places Siva is worshipped as symbolically represented by a Liṅga, and for this reason he is known as Liṅgarāja. Sometimes a snake is to be found twined round the Liṅga. Two snakes with their hoods meeting together above the Liṅga, or arising on either side of it as devotees, are found in some of the temples of South India.<sup>7</sup> Images of five hooded snakes forming a

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1. I.A., Vol. 44, p.74 (Supplements)

2. Ibid., Vol.46, p.140 (Supplements)

3. E.T. Atkinson, Himalayan Districts of N.W. Provinces of India, Vol.11, p.851.

4. Ibid., p.777.

5. J. Muir, Original Sanskrit Texts, Vol. IV, p.191.

6. Vogel, op.cit., p.202.

7. Fergusson, Tree and Serpent Worship, pp.75f.



canopy over the Liṅga are recorded.<sup>1</sup> In the Śiva temple at Varasasi carved snakes encircle several of the Liṅgas.<sup>2</sup> Sometimes a hooded snake seems to have represented the Liṅga.<sup>3</sup> When a member of the Liṅgāyat sect takes part in the worship of Śiva's son Virabhadra, he wears on his head-cloth a liṅgam with a five-headed snake forming a canopy over it and the sacred bull Basava in front.<sup>4</sup> On the Nāgapañchamī the Liṅgāyats worship the image of a snake made of earth and offer it various sacrifices.<sup>5</sup>

It is noteworthy that Manasā is believed to be the daughter of Śiva. This is perhaps the result of the close association of snakes with Śiva, whose cult may well have had its origin among people who revered snakes. The association of the snake cult with Śaivism in present day Bengal has been reported by A. Bhattacharya, who observes that live snakes are preserved and worshipped in many popular Śaiva shrines. In some places the snake cult has been merged in the local Śaiva cult where no rites of the snake goddess Manasā are performed separately. In such

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1. M. Williams, Brahmanism and Hinduism or Religious Thought and Life in India, p. 321.
  2. J.A.S.B., Vol. 48, p. 18.
  3. Ibid, p. 24.
  4. Thurston, Castes and Tribes of Southern India, Vol. IV, p. 257.
  5. Thurston, Omens and Superstitions, p. 135.

places the two rituals seem to be inseparable.<sup>1</sup> In a Siva temple at Thirukalacheri near Tranquebar in Kerala a live snake is preserved. The snake lives on milk which is offered daily.<sup>2</sup>

The evidence cited above is enough for our purpose, and shows that the snake in relation to Saivism is not a mere weapon of Siva, as Fergusson believed, but something much more. In our opinion, the Saivas have accepted ophiolatry as a part of their cult. Thus it seems probable that the same people or races worshipped both Siva (and "Proto-Siva") and snakes at an early period, as is still the case in most parts of India.

#### The Sun and the Serpent.

Oldham in his book "The Sun and the Serpent" has attempted to establish the theory that the snake was held sacred among the people of "the solar race" throughout the world and that it would seem to have been the earliest totem of the those people who worshipped the Sun as their supreme deity.<sup>3</sup> In ancient Indian art we find the representation of human figures with, behind the head, a spread cobra's hood with heads varying from three to seven. They are believed to have been worshipped as Nāga gods.

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1. Folklore, Vol. II, No.1, p.46.

2. Man in India, Vol. 27, p.57.

3. Oldham, op.cit., pp.47, 182, 184, 206.

"These people", according to Oldham, "were the chiefs of 'the solar race' who are worshipped as gods or demigods and these deified chiefs were the Nāgas of Swarga (Indra's heaven) and of the epic poems; the celestial serpents belonging to Sūrya (the Sun) of the Brahmanical writers and the Nāga rājas of Indian folklore".<sup>1</sup>

It has been pointed out that sun-worshipping peoples always seem to claim descent from the Sun-god and to them the hooded serpent was held sacred. The sun and the serpent are closely connected in many regions, such as China, West Africa, India, Peru, Babylonia, Syria and other parts of West Asia, Greece, Egypt and Europe, where many of the ancient rulers as well as the people in general claimed descent from the Sun and used the hooded serpent as their totem.<sup>2</sup> In order to maintain his thesis Oldham goes further and declares that "the worship of the Sun and the serpent was everywhere conducted with the same or almost the same rites and ceremonial as those now, or formerly existing in India."<sup>3</sup>

The connection of snakes with water led ancient writers and folk-tellers to depict them as the controllers

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1. Oldham, op.cit., p.182.

2. Ibid, pp.183,185,194-197.

3. Ibid., p.183.

of the rain and hurricane. C.S.Wake in pointing this out further suggested that the snake's "most natural association would be with the solar cult. The serpent was, indeed, the Sun-god or spirit of the sun, and therefore, Power, Wisdom, Light and a fit type of creation and generative power".<sup>1</sup> Father Heras has tried to show that the sun is the supreme being, Ān, of the Mohenjo-daro people.<sup>2</sup>

From the analogies put forward by Oldham and Wake we may believe that the sun-god and snakes seem often to have been connected in the ancient world, probably because of their imagined lordship over the atmospheric phenomena. However, this is not an adequate reason for accepting Oldham's theory. Nowhere in India do we find any iconographic, literary or anthropological example of people with serpent hoods on their heads worshipping the sun-god, as Oldham claimed was the original form of this cult. We have only one sculptural representation of the Hindu Sun-god Sūrya with a canopy over his head which seems to be in the form of a seven-headed serpent.<sup>3</sup> To strengthen the theory it has been pointed out that "Vishnu, who is a form of the sun-god in India, is represented as floating upon the ocean,

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1. C.S.Wake, op.cit., pp.3,105.

2. J.University of Bombay, Vol.V, pp.7-9, 12-13.

3. Oldham, op.cit., p.47.

supported by the many headed serpent".<sup>1</sup> However, this reference to Hindu mythology gives no evidence that the snake was held sacred by those people who worshipped the Sun or Sun- god as their supreme deity. Vishnu may have had solar characteristics in the Vedic period, but in classical times, when these legends arose, he was not specially connected with the Sun.

#### Vaishnavism:

Though the connection is not as close as in Saivism there are numerous legends relating the god Vishnu or one of his incarnations to snake worship, and these are often represented iconographically. In Indian mythology we are told that the great and pious snake Sesha is a manifestation of Vishnu. It is on this great snake that Vishnu reclines during the intervals of creation. The common pictorial representation of this concept is of a snake resting on the waters with his many headed hood suspended over Vishnu, while a lotus springs from the god's navel and the four-headed Brahmā is seen emerging from the flower.<sup>2</sup> An almost similar sculptural representation is

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1. Oldham, op.cit., p.52; J.R.A.S., 1895, p.175.

2. E.Moor, The Hindu Pantheon, pp.22,26 and Plates 7,8; V.S. Smith, History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon, pp.162-164 & Plate XXXV; Macfie, Myths and Legends of India, p.308. "Hari sleeping on a serpent, is one of the titles of Vishnu, the deity in his preserving quality...The Hindus are taught to believe, that at the end of every Calpa (creation or formation) all things are absorbed in the Deity, and that, in the interval of another, creation, he reposes himself upon the serpent Sesha (duration), who is also called Ananta(endless)." (Wilkins, quoted by E.Moor, op.cit., p.27).

found in one of the cave temples at Ellora.<sup>1</sup> Vishṇu in this pose is popularly known as Śeṣha-Nārāyaṇa. At Than in Kathiawad there is a temple of Bāshanji, locally known as Śeṣha-Nārāyaṇa, where the principal image is a three-headed cobra with a smaller monocephalous one on each side on the same slab. On the left is a four-armed figure of Vishṇu and on and in front of the altar on which the images are placed are Śāligrāms and conch shells. Actually the offering is paid to the three snakes.<sup>2</sup> A few ancient images of standing Vishṇu with a canopy formed by seven hoods of cobras above his head have been found in Bengal and other places.<sup>3</sup>

A favourite theme of Hindu artists was the legendary fight between the snake Kāliya of the Yamanā and Kṛishṇa, who finally taught a lesson to the reptile, so that he left his pool for good. It is believed that the scene of the fight was in Mathura where a fair called Nāga-Līlā, is celebrated among the people of that locality in Kālimardan Ghāt. This is followed by a procession of boats.<sup>4</sup> J.N. Banerjea writes that the Epic and Purāṇic account of Kṛishṇa's

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1. J.Fergusson and J.Burgess, The Cave Temples of India, p.461.

2. I.A., Vol.4, p.6.

3. Varendra Research Society Monograph, No.4, p.13; Archaeological Collection of British Museum, Indian Section, No.1958, 7-18,1.

4. Vogel, op.cit., p.91.



fight with Kāliya and his victory over him signifies "the suppression of the more primitive Nāga cult by the newer and more generally accepted Kṛṣṇa cult of the Mathura region."<sup>1</sup>

At the Pandharpur temple of Gopālakṛiṣṇa the figure of Rādhā holding snakes is roughly carved round the lower half of the masonry door frame.<sup>2</sup> Balarāma or Baladeva, the eldest brother of Kṛiṣṇa, is said to have been an incarnation of the Nāga Śeṣha.<sup>3</sup> He is referred to in the Mahābhārata as having his head sheltered by the hoods of snakes.<sup>4</sup> One day he appeared as the serpent king with a thousand heads, with other numbers of his race as attendants, and his numerous coils served as a couch for Kṛiṣṇa. It is also written that at Balarāma's death his soul came out of his body in the form of a snake through his mouth.<sup>5</sup> Images of Balarāma or Baladeva, protected by a snake hood or hoods (usually from five to seven), have been discovered in different parts of India.<sup>6</sup> A canopy of five snake hoods is occasionally found over the idols of Kṛiṣṇa.<sup>7</sup>

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1. J.N.Banerjea, The Development of Hindu Iconography pp.346-347.
  2. Bombay Gazetteer, Vol.XX, 1884, p.463.
  3. Mahabharata, Anuśāsana, 147.57 (Ed. by P.C. Ray)
  4. Ibid., Anuśāsana, 147.58 (Ed. by P.C. Ray)
  5. Macfie, op.cit., p.161.
  6. J.B.O.R.S., Vol.28, p.156.
  7. M.Williams, op.cit., p.321.

While tracing the relationship between the snake cult and Vaishnavism Vogel writes that the Bhāgavatas adopted the popular worship of the Nāgas by declaring the Nāga image to represent the elder brother of Kṛishṇa. In this way the village folk persisted in worship their snake canopied idols as Baladeva.<sup>1</sup> It is further reported that the village Baladev, situated at a distance of 8 miles south-east of Mathura, derives its name from an image which is believed to represent Baladeva or Balarāma but the image is nothing but an ancient Nāga figure.<sup>2</sup> The process of the assimilation of the snake cult by the Vaishnavas is found in South Orissa in the present practice of Baladeva worship, which is performed on the full moon day of Śrāvaṇa. On this occasion the cows are decorated and honoured. But in some Brahman villages and in the royal families a snake of earth is made and worshipped under the name Gahmā. The snake of earth is also called Baladeva. The term Gahmā is believed to have been derived from goghna meaning killer of a cow.<sup>3</sup> B.Mishra relates this word to a local superstition. "A class of snakes are sometimes found sucking milk from the udder of cow in the dry season. After sucking,

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1. A.R.A.S.I., 1908-'9, p.162.

2. Ibid., p.161.

3. O.H.R.J., Nos. 3 and 4, pp.42-43.



the teats cease permanently to give passage to the flow of milk, if an hair from boar's tail is not thrust into the passage immediately. Thus the snake appears to be goghna meaning killer of cow".<sup>1</sup> This practice suggests that in Orissa the snake cult has been assimilated within the fold of Baladeva worship, probably for the reason suggested by Vogel. The use of the earthen snake on the day of Baladeva worship suggests that it is an attempt to protect the cow from the attack of snakes as described above by paying homage to both the snakes and Baladeva or Balarāma together. The assimilation of the snake cult by the Vaishnavas can be further supported by the fact that the great Vaishnava reformer Rāmānuja is supposed to have been an incarnation of Sesha.<sup>2</sup>

#### Miscellaneous deities:

References to the association of the snake with other deities are also to be found. The four-armed Sakti Devī of Chatrārī, the personification of divine power, holds a snake in one of her left hands.<sup>3</sup> In South India snake images are commonly found in Kālī temples, as these reptiles

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1. Ibid., p.43.

2. W.J.Wilkins, Modern Hinduism, pp.59-60.

3. A.R.A.S.I., 1902-'3, p.241.

are looked on as favourites of the goddess.<sup>1</sup> A representation of the same goddess with her hair brushed back under a snake fillet and capped by a expanded snake hood is found at Jaipur in Orissa.<sup>2</sup> At the Ilavar temple near Chākki in the outskirts of Trivandrum is a seated figure of the goddess Bhadrakālī with two wings and covered with snakes.<sup>3</sup> Many figures of Dravidian goddesses, like Ellammā or her representation, the Mātangi, are accompanied by snake symbols.<sup>4</sup> Five figures of snake stones were found in the court of the temple of Māruti, in the village of Konur in Western India.<sup>5</sup> Of six images in the temple at Sinda Mananli four represent snakes and only two represent Hindu gods.<sup>6</sup> Even today if a ploughman of the Himalayan areas injures or kills a snake while ploughing, he worships Mrityuñjaya (an epithet of Śiva) and the snake god by sketching the figures of both gods on a cloth, as well as worshipping other deities such as Ganeśa, the Mātris and Kshetrapāla.<sup>7</sup>

These are only a few references among many which show the popularity of the snake cult among the Hindus, who

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1. Thurston, Castes and Tribes of Southern India, Vol.11, p.406.
  2. W.W.Hunter, Orissa, Vol.1, p.269.
  3. Thurston, Castes and Tribes of Southern India, Vol.11, p.406.
  4. Ibid., Vol.IV, pp.300,306.
  5. A.S.R.W.I., 1874, p.43.
  6. Ibid.
  7. Atkinson, Himalayan Districts of N.W. Provinces, Vol.2, p.913.

assimilated it to their own religion at a very early period.

### Buddhism

Popular Buddhism in India was closely connected with the snake cult and the Nāgas played a great rôle in the field of Buddhist religion. Fergusson has suggested that the kings of Magadha at the time of the Buddha were of the Nāga race<sup>1</sup> and that the dispersion of Buddhism was probably due to the acceptance of it by these kings, who subsequently made it the religion of the state.<sup>2</sup> This view is supported by Wake, who adds that the religious ideas of the Nāgas had probably much in common with those of the Buddha himself.<sup>3</sup> According to a Hindu legend Gantama is believed to have had a serpent lineage.<sup>4</sup> If this was so, it is not surprising that his teachings should be accepted by the Nāgas, who no doubt belonged to the pre-Aryan stock. However, these interpretations of 19th century authorities offer some difficulty, especially as it is now generally accepted that the descent of Ajātaśatru from Siśunāga, as given in the Purāṇas, is false, and that Siśunāga in fact came to power in Magadha about a century

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1. Fergusson, Tree and Serpent Worship, p.64.

2. Ibid., p.67.

3. Wake, op.cit., pp.91-92.

4. Ibid., p.92.

after the Buddha's death.<sup>1</sup> Nevertheless the interpretation of the Nāgas of Buddhist tradition as non-Aryan peoples seems to have much to commend it, and often gives a tentative explanation of otherwise very obscure stories.

V.A. Smith believes that the Nāga water spirits and their consorts were worshipped by the early Buddhists.<sup>2</sup> However Fergusson advocated the view that the snake cult was probably rejected by Buddha but later on this old faith cropped up in Buddhism and possibly occupied a position almost equal with that of the Buddha from the beginning of the Christian era, as is evident from the Buddhist sculptures at Amarāvati.<sup>3</sup> Fergusson's idea of the complete rejection of the snake cult by Buddha can hardly be accepted, as we have already seen that even the upper class people of India by this time accepted the snake cult and he is nowhere referred to as forbidding this, though in certain passages he criticises popular magico-religious ceremonies generally.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, we have ample references to the friendly relations of the Buddha with the

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1. H. Raychandhuri, Political History of Ancient India, pp. 81f.
  2. V.A. Smith, History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon, p. 10.
  3. Fergusson, Tree and Serpent Worship, p. 444.
  4. E.G. Dīgha Nikaya, iii, 180ff.

Nāgas, who appear in Buddhist sculptures. Numerous legends relating to the Buddha and the Nāgas in Buddhist literature also go against the view of Fergusson. It is wrong to think that Buddhism rejected all the older beliefs. In our opinion it seems clear that the early Buddhists, or at least the laymen among them, continued to worship snakes.

2/ Innumerable legends relating the Buddha and the Nāgas, found in the early Buddhist writings, have been ably dealt with by Vogel in his book, Indian Serpent Lore. Here we shall just mention a few of these as their detailed study falls outside the scope of our work. It is stated in the Buddhist writings that the two Nāgas, Nanda and Upananda were of great help at the time of Buddha's birth and gave him his first bath.<sup>1</sup> According to tradition the Nāga King Muchilinda sheltered Buddha from rain and wind for a week when the Lord was engaged in meditation.<sup>2</sup> Sculptural representations of this scene are found in Sānchī and Amarāvati panels. Fergusson, after a careful study of these, concluded that in more than one sculpture

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1. A.Getty, The Gods of Northern Buddhism, p.172; Vogel, op.cit. pp.95-96 and Plate VI(a); N.Dutt and K.D.Bajpai, Development of Buddhism in Uttar Pradesh, p.389.
  2. Getty, op.cit., p.172; Vogel, op.cit., pp.102-105; N.Dutt and K.D.Bajpai, op.cit., p.389.

the snake occupies the place of honour normally given to a symbol of Buddha.<sup>1</sup> The Nāgas and their wives, the former crowned with snake-hoods of three, five, seven and sometimes more heads and the latter with single or three snake-hoods, appear in the sculptures of Sānchī, Amarāvati and other places as devotees of Buddha or Buddhist emblems.<sup>2</sup> This evidence strongly suggests the early association of the snake cult and of snake worshipping people with Buddhism. This view is further supported by the existence of a snake goddess Jāṅgulī among the Mahāyāna Buddhists.<sup>3</sup>

#### Jainism:

The association of early Jainism with the snake cult is not to be neglected. It is well known that in almost all Jaina temples snake images are found.<sup>4</sup> Three well known Jaina statues having snakes at their feet are found at three different Digambara sacred places, at Sravana Belgolā in Mysore and at Karkala and Yenur or Vernur, both in South Kanara. A similar representation is found in the Jaina cave at Bādāmi.<sup>5</sup> The most notable conversion of snakes with Jainism is the use of the snake as a symbol of

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1. Fergusson, Tree and Serpent Worship, pp.243-244 and Plates XXIV. fig.1, LXXVI.
  2. For details see Fergusson, Tree and Serpent Worship and Vogel, Indian Serpent Lore.
  3. Infra, pp. 356-365
  4. I.A., Vol.7, p.43; Vogel, op.cit., p.270.
  5. Fergusson, History of Indian and Eastern Architecture, Vol.11, pp.72-73; Oldham, op.cit., pp.177f.

the Jina Pārśvanātha. He is represented either with a seven-hooded snake expanding over his head, or as sitting on the expanded hoods of a snake with many heads.<sup>1</sup> It was believed by the Jainas that an antidote against snake-bite was to pronounce the name of Pārśvanātha. It is thought that the name Pārśva was derived from the fact that his mother saw a snake crawling at her side (Pārśva) when she was pregnant with him.<sup>2</sup> According to a Jaina legend, when Pārśvanātha was engaged in his devotions his enemy at each birth, Kamaṭha or Kaṭha, caused a great rain and thunderstorm to disturb him in his meditations. The serpent king Dharaṇendra or Dharāṇa with his wife Padmāvatī came to protect the Lord, and overshadowed his head with his seven hoods, which formed as it were an umbrella. It is also told that the queen Padmāvatī held a white umbrella (śvetā chhatrī) over the Lord for protection.<sup>3</sup> Representations of this legend are found in the early sculpture of the cave temples at Bādāmi, Ellora, etc.<sup>4</sup> One of the finest specimens of these is an elaborate sculpture in sandstone

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1. I.A., Vol.2, p.139; J.G.Bühler, On the Indian Sect of the Jainas, Ed. & Tr. by J.Burgess, pp.64,71; Vogel, op.cit., p.104. For plates see M.S.Nawab, Jaina Tirtha's in India and their Architecture.
  2. I.A., Vol. 30, p.302, footnote.
  3. J.G. Bühler, op.cit., pp.63-64; M.Bloomfield, The Life and Stories of Pārśvanātha, p.118; I.A., Vols. 2, p.139 and 30, pp. 302-303.
  4. J.G. Bühler, op.cit., p.64.

of the 7th century A.D. from a Jaina temple at Gyaraspur, near Bhilsa, Madhya Pradesh, which is now preserved in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London.<sup>1</sup> In the Satruñjaya Māhātmya Dhareṇendra is said to have approached Pārśva to worship him, when he was engaged in his second Kāyotsarga or profound meditation, at Sivapuri in the Kaṇṣāmbaka forest, and to have held his hood over him as an umbrella.<sup>2</sup> Supārśva, the seventh Tīrthankara, is also represented with a hooded snake.<sup>3</sup>

Numerous snake-stones are found within and around Jaina temples. Some of these stones are said to show the stamp of great antiquity.<sup>4</sup> M.J.Walhouse notices a naked figure of a woman with a snake encircling the right thigh among the Jaina remains in the neighbourhood of Hassan and Halebid in Mysore. This sculpture is always accompanied by a small attendant figure.<sup>5</sup> The same author heard many stories relating to the approaches of cobras to human beings with a view to making friends, and he suggests that this sculpture depicts some such incident. He refers to a story published in Western Star, 1871, which is as follows: "A very extra-

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1. Victoria and Albert Museum, No.1.S. 18-1956.

2. I.A., Vol.2, p.139.

3. Karmarkar, op.cit., p.171, N.Dutt and K.D.Bajpai, op.cit., p.389.

4. I.A., Vols.1, pp.150,372 and 7, p.44.

5. Ibid., Vol.7, p.44.



ordinary incident was lately reported to have occurred a few miles from Bepur, in Malabar. A native female of very attractive appearance, whilst sweeping the yard of her house, heard a hissing noise behind her. Turning to see, she found to her terror a large cobra advancing towards her. Before she could fly or call for help, the snake darted at her and coiled round one of her legs, rising swiftly higher and higher till it brought its open hood in contact with her face, there moving it to and fro like a screen. In this pitiable and frightful position she had to remain for nearly two days, without being able to lie down to sleep. None but females could approach her to feed her with milk and plantains, when, it is said, the cobra turned its head to one side, allowing her to nourish herself. But on any man coming near the cobra would hiss fearfully and tighten its hold around her body in such a manner as to make her feel breathless. Many conjurors came to relieve her, but none succeeded, till a Nair from the interior, by certain charms and spells, disentangled the poor woman from her venomous lover. The snake then crept back into the bushes whence it came, and the woman is now doing well. The above occurrence is now a general talk amongst the natives."<sup>1</sup> On the basis of this

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1. I.A., Vol.7, p.44; Also see, Thurston, Omens and Superstitions, p.91.

story Walhouse concludes that "such an occurrence with whatever foundation real or fancied, may throw some light upon the Jaina sculptures, as well as upon the stories current all over the world of serpent husbands and serpent wives, or deities assuming serpent shape - "a dragon's fiery form belied the god'." <sup>1</sup> In our opinion it is not wise to seek any relation between this type of Jaina sculpture and the above fantastic story. The nature of the venomous cobra is well known to the Indians, who still die from its bite in large numbers every year. Of course evidence of tame snakes living in houses is not uncommon in India. <sup>2</sup> Though there is no mention of this iconographical form in any Jaina text, we are bold enough to suggest that it may be a rare type of image of the snake goddess Padmāvatī of the Digambara sect. The question is left for the further investigation of future scholars.

There is a famous snake-hill known as Nāgamalai in Madura which is believed to be the remains of a great snake created by the magical power of the Jainas and prevented by the grace of Siva from devouring Saiva city of Madura. <sup>3</sup> At Ramatirtham in Vizianagram taluk there is a standing Jaina

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1. Ibid.,

2. cf. H.Whitehead, Indian Problems in Religion, Education and Politics, p.10.

3. W.Francis, Madura District Gazetteers, Madura, Vol.I,p.7.

image, behind which curls a cobra with expanded hood playing above the head of the figure.<sup>1</sup> Like the other two religious systems of India, Jainism has assimilated the cult into its own faith.<sup>2</sup>

Thus we have seen that the snake cult and the snake-spirits (Nāgas and Nāginīs) entered largely into the mythology and religion of the Hindus, Buddhists and Jainas.

#### IV. Methods of Worship

The early methods of worship which can be traced from the literature and the art, are the following:

1. Live snake worship - The earliest reference of this practice is found in the accounts of Greek writers who visited India. Aelian writes that "when Alexander was assaulting some of the cities in India and capturing others, he found in many of them, besides other animals, a snake which the Indians, regarding as sacred, kept in a cave and worshipped with much devotion."<sup>3</sup> He and other writers also mention the immense size of this reptile. Thus this account, apparently transmitted from the 4th century B.C., records the worship of living snakes in the Punjab.

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1. W.Francis, Madura District Gazetteers, Vizagapatam, Vol.1, p.335.
  2. See J.C.Jain, Life in Ancient India as depicted in the Jain Canons, pp.219-220.
  3. On the Peculiarities of Animals, XV.xxi; M'Crindle, Ancient India p.145.

Similar evidence of keeping live snakes in the temples and feeding them with sacrificial offerings, including human sacrifices in some cases, is to be found from different parts of the ancient world.<sup>1</sup> The worship of live snakes either in temples or at ant-hills is not uncommon even today in India.<sup>2</sup> The poisonous snakes were and still are controlled by the power of medicine-men who used the herbs and other means to tame the reptile. As it is believed<sup>3</sup> that 'the age of magic' passed into 'the age of religion' so also the practice of live snake worship, which seems to have originated earlier than any other method of propitiating snakes, passed into other forms of worship.

II. Sarpabali Ceremony - We have already referred<sup>4</sup> to this ceremony, which was performed to propitiate serpents especially in the month of Śrāvana. In the age of the Sūtras various forms of offering to snakes were made,<sup>5</sup>

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1. E.R.E., XI., pp.401-402,404.

2. Ibid., p.415; Rice, Mysore Gazetteer, Vol.I, pp.454-455; Imperial Gazetteer of India, Vol.VIII, p.59.

3. Frazer, The Magic Art (G.B.), Vol.I, part.I, pp.233-243; We do not imply here our categorical acceptance of Frazer's famous theory. E.O.James writes: "Therefore, as far back as the archaeological evidence takes us, magic and religion appear to have been very closely related, and there is nothing to suggest that originally one discipline had priority over the other either in time or importance" (Comparative Religion, p.56)

4. Supra, pp. 26 f.

5. Ram Gopal, op.cit., p.469; V.M.Apte, op.cit., pp.119-122.

and "in the daily offering known as Baliharapa a share was allotted, besides others, to the snake god Vāsuki in the corners of the house".<sup>1</sup> An almost similar practice, with the addition of making an image of a snake either of earth or of cow-dung, or of painting a figure of a snake on the house wall or the floor, is still widely prevalent in many places of India.<sup>2</sup>

III. Worship of Nāga images - Regarding the characteristics of the Nāgas scholars differ in their opinions. But it is generally believed<sup>3</sup> that they were worshipped as snake spirits, as is still the case in many places. C.F. Oldham writes: "The serpent-gods are worshipped now, as they were then, not as dangerous reptiles, nor as mere symbols, but as the deified rulers of an ancient people, whose tribal, or rather, perhaps, racial, emblem was the Nāga, or hooded serpent."<sup>4</sup> He further continues that "it is necessary to distinguish between the Nāga demigods in heaven and the Nāga people on earth. The former were the deified ancestors

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1. R.Gopal, op.cit., p.391.

2. Atkinson, op.cit., Vol.II, pp.836,851; Crooke, In Introduction to the Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India, pp. 272-273; Panjab Notes and Queries, Vol. III, 1886, p.75.

3. Coomaraswamy, History of Indian and Indonesian Art, p.68; J.N. Banerjea, op.cit., p.344; A.L.Basham, op.cit., p.317.

4. Oldham, op.cit., p.85.

of the latter".<sup>1</sup> Vogel<sup>2</sup> reckons that " we might assume that in ancient India deceased rulers were sometimes worshipped in the form of snakes (a supposition which in itself seems quite plausible), this would present again a new aspect of serpent-worship. We possess, however, no proof either archaeological or literary of such a custom". Both the theories should be combined, together with some additions, if this hypothesis is to be accepted. It might be the case that the belief in the worship of dead kings and other persons originated among people who worshipped snakes from fear, used them as symbols, and believed in the return of the spirits of the dead, particularly of important persons, in the form of snakes.

It is certainly worthy of note that Gūgā, a deified legendary ruler, is widely worshipped as a snake god, especially by the lower classes in the Eastern Panjab, Uttar-Pradesh and Rajasthan. Different legends place him in different periods, though none can be accepted with certainty.<sup>3</sup> Similar evidence of legendary deified snake heroes is not lacking in India.<sup>4</sup> A similar belief in

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1. Ibid., p.31.

2. Vogel, op.cit., p.5.

3. Vogel, op.cit., pp.263-266.

4. Crooke, Religion and Folklore of N.India, Vol.II, pp.133-134.



the appearance of heroes or the dead as serpents was current in Greece, and special sanctity was attached to snakes for this reason.<sup>1</sup> Among the Bahima of Ankole, in Central Africa, it is believed that "the spirits of the dead princes and princesses come to life again in the form of snakes, which burst from their dead bodies in... the ... forest; there is a temple in the forest where priests feed and guard the holy serpents,"<sup>2</sup> Frazer further writes that "with many savages a reason for respecting and sparing certain species of animals is a belief that the souls of their dead kinsfolk are lodged in these creatures."<sup>3</sup> The same scholar continues that "the doctrine of the re-incarnation of human souls in the bodies either of men or of animals, which meets us as an article of faith in so many savage tribes, has a special interest for the historian of thought, because it has been adopted more or less explicitly and employed, not merely as a philosophical theory, but as a means of enforcing moral lessons by thinkers, teachers, and law-givers among various civilised peoples, notably in Ancient India and Greece."<sup>4</sup>

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1. E.R.E., XI., p.404.

2. Frazer, Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild, Vol.II, p.288.

3. Ibid., p.283.

4. Frazer, Spirits of the Corn and of the Wild (G.B.), Vol.II, p.298; cf. E.B.Tylor, Primitive Culture, Vol.II, pp.1-18; C.S.Wake, op.cit., p.272.

Thus the worship of deceased persons as snake spirits known as Nāgas may have been one of the methods of propitiating the snakes, though the hypothesis depends mainly on the analogy of other cultures. These snake spirits or gods with snake-hoods varying from three to seven are usually represented in Indian art in three different types - i) theriomorphic, ii) anthropomorphic and iii) therio-anthropomorphic (a human bust with a serpent's tail). These snake gods mostly appear in sculptures with their consorts having a single snake-hood or sometimes more. Banerjea writes that "the Nāgas and Nāginīs had far more individualistic iconographic traits from the earliest times and the wide prevalence of the 'snake cult' in India also explains their retention".<sup>1</sup> It is further suggested that "the Nāga images, found in the Mathura region and mostly to be dated in the early centuries of the Christian era, are real cult objects, inasmuch as they were enshrined by their votaries".<sup>2</sup> S.C. De, after a careful study of a good number of Nāga and Nāginī images, discovered in different parts of Orissa in general and Bhubaneswar in particular, concludes that these were used as cult images

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1. Banerjea, op.cit., p.344.

2. Banerjea, op.cit., p.349; cf., O.H.R.J., Vol. III, No.1, pp.4-5; Vol. V, Nos. 3 and 4, p.191.



and that Bhubaneswar was also a centre of the Nāga cult in the same period as Mathura.<sup>1</sup> Thus it appears that these images were worshipped as snake gods and goddesses in the ancient period. Nowadays in some places of Orissa they are worshipped as Grāmadevatās.<sup>2</sup>

It is to be noted that the theory of the worship of deceased rulers as snake gods, put forward by Oldham and Vogel in 1905 and 1926 respectively, has not been taken into consideration by scholars such as V.A. Smith, T.A. Gopinath Rao, A.K. Coomaraswamy, and J.N. Banerjī, who have contributed much on the Iconography of Indian religions, nor they have especially dealt with the Nāgas, who cover a vast field in the mythologies of Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina. It appears to us that they hold the view that the Nāgas were worshipped as deities without being connected either with deified rulers or with deceased ones. In our opinion the views of Oldham and Vogel deserve further consideration.

#### V. Origin of other beliefs relating to the cult.

Though ophiolatry was the outcome of fear, many beliefs were manifested within the cult, primarily based on the

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1. O.H.R.J., Vol. III, No.1, pp.1-5.

2. Ibid., p.1.

habits and nature of the reptile. Many such beliefs which are still current in India seem to have originated in the ancient period. They are as follows:

I. Water spirits - V.A. Smith<sup>1</sup> observes that the Nāgas and their consorts were worshipped as water spirits in the ancient period. This view is strongly supported by H.Kern<sup>2</sup>, B.Rowland<sup>3</sup> and Swami Sankarananda<sup>4</sup>. Kern's view, as translated and expressed by Vogel, is that "they are to be regarded as personified forces of nature; in the first instance the snake-like coiling rain clouds emitting flashes of lightning - the serpents of the sky - which are transported to the lakes and pools on earth and finally are 'confounded' with real poisonous snakes".<sup>5</sup> Vogel accepts this view as somewhat one-sided and adds that "it emphasizes at any rate a very important aspect of Nāga worship, viz. the close relationship between the Nāgas and the element which in a hot country like India is of such vital significance for human and animal existence. In many a legend the Nāgas are said to haunt lakes and ponds and the sources of rivers. They are beneficial givers of rain, but, if

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1. Smith, History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon, pp.10,138,289.

2. Quoted by Vogel, op.cit., pp.3-4.

3. Benjamin Rowland, The Art and Architecture of India, pp.26, 32,68.

4. Swami Sankarananda, Manasā Charit, 1957, pp.40,66,68.

5. Vogel, op.cit., pp.3-4.

roused to anger, they send down destructive hail-storms and ravage the produce of the fields."<sup>1</sup> The accounts of Chinese pilgrims give some evidence of belief in the Nāgas or Nāgarājas as controlling the waters.<sup>2</sup> In the R̥ig-veda a serpent is referred to as an enemy of Indra. This serpent Ahi is the symbol of the clouds.<sup>3</sup> Indra defeated Ahi, who obstructed the flow of water from the sky to earth, and finally he let the water flow<sup>4</sup>. In the Mahābhārata we are told that at the churning of the Ocean the gods stretched Vāsuki, so that black vapours and flames came out of his mouth and became clouds and lightning, and showers of rain poured.<sup>5</sup> In the Buddhist tradition, both Varuṇa and Sāgara, really gods of the sea, have been converted into Nāgarājas and are referred to as such.<sup>6</sup>

In many places of Northern India Nāgas, and sometimes their consorts the Nāginīs, are worshipped as water spirits or genii of lakes and springs.<sup>7</sup> Many lakes and tanks are believed to be sacred to the snakes, and in Kashmir all the wells, particularly the hot springs, are associated with snake worship.<sup>8</sup> The origin of this belief can be traced

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1. Vogel, op.cit., p.4.

2. E.R.E., Vol.XI, p.415.

3. Rig-Veda, I, 32.2.

4. Ibid., I, 32.

5. Mahābhārata, Ādi, 16, 24-26.

6. Vogel, op.cit., p.32.

7. Coomaraswami, op.cit., p.68; Crooke, op.cit., Vol.I, p.43; Vogel, op.cit., pp.226-246, 247-248, 262.

8. E.R.E., Vol.XI, p.415.

back as early as the fortieth year of the Kushāṇa era during the reign of Huvishka, in the light of the discovery of a inscribed Nāga statue near a tank at Chhargaoṇ near Mathura, which was once famous for the Nāga cult.<sup>1</sup> G.C. Chandra, on the basis of the discovery of a number of terracotta snakes at Rajgir, remarks: "The importance of these finds for the interpretation of the character of the Maniyar Maṭh cannot be exaggerated. If this name faithfully preserves the memory of Maṇi Nāga, who, according to the Mahābhārata, was the protector and rain-giver of Rājagṛiha, it may be conjectured that the vessels with multiple channels stimulating showers were used by distressed supplicants praying for rain, and ultimately deposited in the compound of the shrine. Serpent worship was a popular form of religion over a wide expanse of ancient India, but in Rajgir itself its history can be traced almost continuously from about the 3rd century B.C. to the 5th century A.D., to which last period the circular structure at Maniyar Maṭh is to be assigned."<sup>2</sup> Thus the snake gods were worshipped in some cases as the controllers of rains.

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1. Vogel, op.cit., p.42.

2. A.R.A.S.I., 1935-'36, pp.53-54 cf. J.B.O.R.S., Vol. XXIII, pp.120-127.

The cause of the origin of this belief is not far to seek. Among the commonest haunts of snakes are lakes, ponds, springs, pools and rivers. Possibly out of this characteristic feature a belief in the control of water by snakes came into being among the early inhabitants of India. A similar belief is common to many races of the world.<sup>1</sup> However, we are not inclined to agree with the scholars who believe that the snake spirits were originally worshipped as water spirits.<sup>2</sup> This belief came later. The snake is so awe-inspiring that one would expect it, among the most primitive of peoples, to obtain worship in its own right.

II. Ancestor spirits - We have already seen<sup>3</sup> that belief in the transmigration of the souls of the dead into the bodies of animals was common to many races and is still current among a few of them. Why the snakes were believed to contain ancestral spirits, is explained by H. Spencer. He writes: "The other self of the dead relative is supposed to come back occasionally to the old house; how else is it possible for the survivors sleeping there to see him in their dreams? Here are creatures which commonly, unlike

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1. E.R.E., Vol. XI, pp. 401, 415.

2. Supra, p. 61

3. Supra, pp. 58

wild animals, come into houses; come in, too, secretly at night. The implication is clear. That snakes which specially do this are returned dead, is inferred by people in Asia, Africa and America; the haunting of houses being the common trait of the kind of snakes revered and worshipped".<sup>1</sup>

A familiar subject of European folk-lore is the re-incarnation of the dead as snakes.<sup>2</sup> The best expression of this belief is still found in India in slightly different forms. P.Ghosha writes that "each Vāstu, or domicile, is believed to have a representative snake called the Vāstu-Sarpa, which is regarded with great awe. If the Vāstu-Sarpa is seen to abandon a house, it is an unlucky omen, and the perpetuity of the house, the continuity of the race or family, is believed to be endangered".<sup>3</sup> Abbé Dubois wrote in connection with South India that "if a snake happens to get into a house, far from turning out the inconvenient guest and killing it on the spot, they feed it plentifully and offer sacrifices to it daily. Hindus have been known to keep deadly snakes for years in their houses,

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1. H.Spencer, The Principles of Sociology, 1893, Vol.I, p.345; cf. A.D. Gubernatis, Zoological Mythology, 1872, Vol.II, p.407; C.S. Wake, op.cit., p.105.
  2. Crooke, op.cit., Vol.II, p.133.
  3. J.A.S.B., XXXIX, 1870, p.206.

feeding and petting them. Even if a whole family were in danger of losing their lives, no one member of it would be bold enough to lay sacrilegious hands on such an honoured inmate".<sup>1</sup> These beliefs are still current among many of the village folk in India.<sup>2</sup> Thus the haunting of houses by snakes seems to have been the most potent cause of the origin of the belief that the souls of deceased persons return to their residences in the guise of snakes. This belief rules over the minds of many Indians who pay special reverence to snakes. A similar belief is not uncommon outside India.<sup>3</sup>

III. The snake cult and the earth - In ancient Egypt and Greece the snake was believed to be "a son of the earth" and to be associated with fertility.<sup>4</sup> Similarly in our early literature Kadru, the mother of the Nāga race, is believed to be a personification of the earth.<sup>5</sup> The best example of the relation between the snakes and the earth is found in the Rāmāyaṇa.<sup>6</sup> When Sītā's

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1. A.J.A.Dubois, Hindu Manners, Customs, and Ceremonies, 1906, pp.641f.
  2. Man in India, Vol.XXVI,p.62; Indian Folklore, Vol.I,No.2,p.24.
  3. E.R.E., Vol. XI, pp.405ff.
  4. Ibid. p.404; Vogel, op.cit., p.20.
  5. Vogel, op.cit., p.20; N.K.Bhattachali, Iconography of Buddhist and Brahmanical Sculptures in the Dacca Museum, 1929,p.217.
  6. Ramāyana, Uttara K., 99. 10-12.



chastity was doubted, she replied: "I have never thought of anyone but Rāma, and by this strength of mind I pray to the earth goddess for shelter in her lap". Then and there the earth opened before her, and the Earth Goddess, accompanied by two snakes, carrying on their heads a beautiful throne, appeared. Taking Sītā in her arms, she placed her on the throne and disappeared from view. The cause of the origin of belief in the association between the snakes and the earth is probably that the snakes commonly live in holes in the earth. From the same belief ant-hills are worshipped as the abode of snakes in India.<sup>1</sup> In all Indian mythology the Nāgas play a great part as the lords of the Earth, and of its hidden treasures, which they guard in their subterranean realm, Pātāla. The belief is so strong that "the Maharani of Boroda, mounted on an elephant, goes in procession to the woods to worship an ant-hill. The pipers who accompany the procession blow their pipes, and allured by the sound, the snakes come out of their holes, when they are worshipped and fed with milk."<sup>2</sup>

The earth goddess was worshipped as the goddess of fertility, as she is today. Naturally her supposed son -

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1. Indian Antiquary, Vol.IV,p.6; Vogel, op.cit., 173,197,273, 276,281; L.S.S.O. O'Malley, Popular Hinduism, p.166.
  2. R.E. Enthoven, The Folk-Lore of Bombay, p.128.



the snake - was believed to share the power of his mother and was worshipped by primitive people as a divine being who could bestow fertility on their crops and herbs by controlling rain, as we have already seen. In Egypt "a serpent was the embodiment of certain goddesses - e.g., Rannut, goddess of fertility and the harvest, perhaps because snakes found in corn-fields were regarded as local spirits in snake form and were fed."<sup>1</sup> Scholars<sup>2</sup> believe that Ananta or Sesha Nāga was worshipped as a god of harvest and cultivation before he was accepted as an incarnation of Balarāma. E.O. James further adds that "as an agricultural deity he fulfilled the normal function of the serpent in its fertility aspect in the Goddess cult."<sup>3</sup> It is believed by the agricultural communities in South India that the snakes contribute "to the fertility of the soil and the health of the cattle."<sup>4</sup> However we are inclined to think that belief in the snake as a deity of fertility and his share in the power of fertility goddess came into existence from the belief that the snake is the controller of rain which is necessary for cultivation and

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1. E.R.E., XI, p.402.

2. A.Barth, The Religions of India, p.173; E.O.James, The Cult of the Mother Goddess, p.120.

3. James, The Cult of the Mother Goddess, p.120.

4. O.J.M.S., Vol.XXII, 1931-'32, p.428; Man in India, Vol.XXVI, p.57.

production.

There is even a common belief that "if a Nāga appears in a dream, the person is said to be soon blessed with numerous children, a myth apparently connected with aborigines of the soil."<sup>1</sup> It has been suggested that "... probably so long as the desire of offspring is a leading characteristic of the Indian people, so long will the worship of the serpent, or of the snake stones, be a popular cult."<sup>2</sup> Probably for the same reason the snake is worshipped at the time of marriage, especially by the Bedars of the Deccan, the Brahmins in Kanara and the Lambadis in Madras.<sup>3</sup> In South India women of the lower classes worship a snake after marriage in the Go-Pūjā day in the Tamil month of Thai (March-April).<sup>4</sup> In Birbhum, Bengal, among the Subarnabaniks a peculiar marriage rite known as Gāchhabera is current.<sup>5</sup> At this rite Manasā is alone worshipped. Other castes also observe a similar rite, though there is no name for it.<sup>6</sup> It appears to us that these beliefs and practices originated out of the belief in the enormous reproductive power of snakes, who produce

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1. J.A.S.B., Vol.XXXIX, p.220; cf. Indian Folklore, Vol.I, No.2. p.24.

2. Thurston, Omens and Superstitions, p.132.

3. Infra, pp.286

4. Q.J.M.S., Vol. XXII, p.426.

5. Infra, pp. 429-432

6. Infra, p. 432

more eggs than any other creature of common occurrence. From their relation with the earth snakes are believed to be the guardians of buried treasures, and of holy objects in Buddhist tradition.<sup>1</sup>

IV. Tree and Serpent - The association of snakes and trees can be traced back to the Indus Valley period.<sup>2</sup>

In Buddhist India "the tree deities were called Nāgas, and were able at will, to assume the human form; and in one story the spirit of a banyan tree who reduced the merchants to ashes is called a Nāga-rāja, the soldiers he sends forth from his tree are Nāgas, and the tree itself is the dwelling-place of the Nāga."<sup>3</sup> In connection with the legend of Buddha and Muchilinda Vogel writes:

"It is a point of some interest that in the earliest version of this legend which is preserved in the Pali canon mention is made of a Muchilinda-tree which is not spoken of in the later sources. Evidently there is some connection between the Nāga Muchilinda and the tree of the same name under which the Buddha was seated. May we perhaps assume that in the ancient story the Nāga was conceived as a tree-spirit? Such an assumption is all the more plausible as in a Buddhist

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1. E.R.E., XI, p.416; Vogel, op.cit., pp.20-23.

2. A.P. Karmarkar, The Religions of India, Vol.I, p.190.

3. E.R.E., XI. p.417; T.W. Rhys Davids, Buddhist India, p.232.

birth-story we read of a huge banyan-tree which is haunted by Nāgas."<sup>1</sup>

In Mysore, "the stones bearing the sculptured figures of serpents near every village are always erected under certain trees, which are most frequently built round with a raised platform, on which the stones are set up, facing the rising sun. One is invariably a sacred fig, which represents a female, and another a margosa, which represents a male; and these two are married with the same ceremonies as human beings. The bilpatre (aegle marmelos), sacred to Siva, is often planted with them."<sup>2</sup> Similar is the case almost throughout the whole of South India.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, 'snake-groves' are commonly found in many places of South India in general but in Malabar they occur in almost every Hindu house.<sup>4</sup>

The association of the tree and the snake seems to have originated for two reasons - the intrinsic sanctity of the tree in the Indian mind and the fact that trees are considered to be one of the places of residence of snakes. The latter belief is strongly held by South Indians, who

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1. Vogel, op.cit., p.103.

2. B.L.Rice, Mysore Gazetteer, Vol.1, p.455; E.R.E., XI, pp.417-418.

3. Thurston, Omens and Superstitions, p.123; Q.J.M.S., Vol.XXII, p. 426.

4. H.Whitehead, The Village Gods in South India, p.82; Thurston, Omens and Superstitions, p.121; Man in India, Vols. XXVI, p.55 and XXXV, p.133; Q.J.M.S., Vol. XXIX (New Series) p.326.

carefully preserve snake-groves i.e., small gardens reserved for the residence of snakes. And, as a further example of this early association, Manasā is symbolized by a twig of si at her worship. Thus we can safely conclude that in some cases snakes were worshipped as tree-spirits.

From what has been discussed in this chapter it is clear that the snake cult played a great rôle in Ancient India as it does even today. The cult which grew up independently among the early people of India has been accepted by Hindus, Buddhists and Jainas alike who still propitiate snakes or a deity who is believed to control them.

## CHAPTER II

### Socio-Religious Background

The study of the cult of Manasā necessitates the study of the socio-religious background of Bengal at the time of her origin. It is a popular belief among scholars<sup>1</sup> that the origin of this goddess may be traced back to the early period of the Pāla kings. We shall attempt from our study of the narrative poems of Manasā better known as Manasāmaṅgalkāvyas to show how the goddess was at last recognised by the upper strata of society, after a gradual process lasting for centuries, and achieved her fullest development in early mediaeval literature written between the 13th and 15th centuries of our era. One cannot trace the history of the development of religious ideas unless the historical background is taken into consideration. For the purpose of our study let us trace the socio-religious condition of Bengal under the Pālas and the Senas, including

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1. D.C.Sen, Bṛhat Baṅga, pp.467-468,974; N.R.Ray, Bāṅgālīr Itihāsa (Adi parva), p.589; A.Bhattacharya, Bāṅgla Maṅgala Kavyer Itihasa, pp.200,220. It is of interest to note the view of Dr. N.R.Ray who is of opinion that Manasā was accepted and worshipped as a goddess of the Brahmanical pantheon from the early reigns of the Pālas. He was tempted to make this remark from the large number of icons discovered in Bengal and the adjoining states (Infra, Ch. VII).

the other minor dynasties ruling during that period.

The beginning of Pāla rule heralded a new epoch in the history of Bengal in all branches of culture and civilization. This period marked "the evolution of the Bengali people and their language and culture. The vernacular of Bengal, although still in the Middle Indo-Aryan stage, took a definite form, which may be described as 'proto-Bengali', by 800 A.D., when Dharmapāla reigned. The foundation of the Pāla empire synchronized with the birth of the Bengali people as a distinct and important group in the country of the peoples of mediaeval and modern India.<sup>1</sup>"

As regards religion the Pāla kings were great devotees of Mahāyāna Buddhism and stood for the cause of Buddhism both in their domains and outside. But they were tolerant of other religious sects and sympathetic towards Brahmanism. Their catholic attitude is well indicated from the fact that they employed orthodox Brahmans as their hereditary chief ministers. The religious outlook of the Indians was generally tolerant and this characteristic feature of the age has been pointed out: "The religious life in India is marked about this time by a spirit of catholicity and mutual respect and understanding which is hardly compatible

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1. History of Bengal, Vol. 1, p.381.

with a deliberate persecution on sectarian grounds. The barriers between the different religious sects were fast coming down, and Buddhism, as presented in the documents of the Pāla period, exhibits the new tendency of eclecticism such as we find so strikingly illustrated in the career of Harshavardhana".<sup>1</sup> This period also witnessed the reciprocal influence of different religious sects and instances of borrowing and incorporating some deities from one pantheon into another. One of the most notable features in the history of religion of this period was the growth and influence of the Tāntric cult on all the prevailing religious sects. This dominant influence transformed the ideals of some sects of Buddhism and Brahmanical Hinduism almost beyond recognition.

Buddhism: It appears that Buddhism was the predominating religion in Bengal and Bihar during the Pāla supremacy.<sup>2</sup> Under the Pālas and the other minor rulers such as Kāntideva and the Chandra kings, Buddhism in Bengal gained an international prestige, from Tibet in the north to the Islands of the Malay Archipelago in the south.<sup>3</sup> But the general view as to the predominancy of Buddhism in this period is

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1. Ibid., p.416, Cf., H.C.I.P., Vol. V, p.256.
  2. P.L.Paul, Early History of Bengal, Vol.II, pp.71f; S.P.P., Vol. XXXI, 3rd issue, pp.107f.
  3. History of Bengal, Vol. 1, p.417.



rejected by Dr. P.C. Bagchi,<sup>1</sup> who states that "the patronage of the Pālas no doubt gave an impetus to Buddhism and saved the religion from the fate which overtook it in the rest of India, but does not seem to have materially affected the dominant position of the Brahmanical religion. For it is worthy of note that by far the large majority of images and inscriptions which may be assigned to this period between 750 and 1200 A.D. are Brahmanical, and not Buddhist." Dr. Bagchi has made this conclusion primarily on basis of the surviving images. But in this respect Dr. Ray's<sup>2</sup> argument draws our full support. He points out that the way of worship followed by the Vajrayāna Buddhists as depicted in the works of the Siddhāchāryas and some Mahāyana teachers was a mystical one, involving the worship of the concept of a deity in the imagination without the use of an image. For this reason there are few images of the greater Buddhist deities of the Pāla period, though the Buddhist works are full of their descriptions. From this we can safely assume that the predominance of Brahmanic images does not disprove the dominant position of Buddhism in Bengal between the 9th to 11th century A.D., During the Pāla period, other minor

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1. Ibid., p.425.

2. N.R. Ray, op.cit., p.649.

rulers such as Kāntideva of Harikela, a portion of South and West Bengal, and Trailokya Chandra and his son Sri Chandra, in a part of Southern and Eastern Bengal, all of whom ruled roughly from circa 950-1000 A.D., also subscribed to the Buddhist faith. One of the important centres of Tāntric Buddhism was Vaṅgala, which was then ruled by the Buddhists Chandra kings. Even the legendary king Gopichandra or Govindachandra, who renounced the world and attached himself to mystical Buddhism is said to have been a member of the Chandra dynasty, and the wide-famed Buddhist Siddhāchārya Atīśa Dīpaṅkara is said to have come of royal stock and to have been born in Vaṅgala, and may have been a member of this family.<sup>1</sup>

However, in the reigns of the Sena kings, who migrated from the Karnāṭa country and were Brahmans by caste, we find Brahmanism as the dominant religion in Bengal. The Senas and Varmans who took over the thrones of the Pālas and Chandras respectively actively worked for the welfare and promotion of the Brahmanical religion, which had been deprived of the prestige of being the chief religion of the kings of Bengal for about four hundred years. Unlike the Pālas and Chandras, the Senas and Varmans were not well

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1. History of Bengal, Vol. 1, p.418.

disposed to religious sects other than their own.<sup>1</sup> References to the direct oppression of the Buddhists by the Senas and Varmans are very few, but severe criticism of Buddhism and disrespect to its followers are well attested from the inscriptional and literary evidence of this period.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the temper of the age towards Buddhism can be well shown by epigraphic evidence, which shows that once a Vangala army burnt a part of the monastery of Somapura, where a Bhikshu died in the conflagration. It is believed by Dr. Ray that this great monastery was burnt by the soldiers of Jaṭavarman.<sup>3</sup> During the Sena-Varman period Buddhism began to decay rapidly and received its death-blow from the hands of the Muslims under the leadership of Muhammad Bakhtyār Khaljī about the year 1202 A.D. After the fall of the Pālas the fate of Buddhism in Bengal seems to have been that of the religion in the rest of India. From this time onwards the Brahmans assimilated the Buddhists' literature, science, philosophy and logic into their own religion.<sup>4</sup> The Buddhism of this period has been described by J.N. Farquhar as "slowly dying, poisoned by Tāntrism and weakened by Hindu violence and criticism".<sup>5</sup>

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1. D.C.Sen, Brihat Baṅga, pp.528-530; N.R.Ray, op.cit., pp.667-668.
  2. N.R.Ray, op.cit., p.667f; S.P.P., Vol. XXXVII, 4th issue, p. 209.
  3. Epigraphica Indica, XXI, p.97; N.R.Ray, op.cit., p.291.
  4. D.C.Sen, Brihat Baṅga, p.331; S.P.P., Vol. XXXVI, 1st issue, pp. 1-21.
  5. J.N.Farquhar, An Outline of the Religious Literature of India, p.27.

There was much difference between the pre-Pāla Buddhism, as noticed by the Chinese pilgrims and reflected in epigraphical and archaeological records, and Buddhism during the Pāla-Sena period. The Buddhism of Pāla times was marked by "the decadence of pure Hīnayāna and Mahāyāna Buddhism but also the appearance of a new phase of the religion, in which the original ethical and philosophical principles were superimposed in such a way by an esoteric Yogic system combined with endless rituals and forms of worship, that it could hardly be called Buddhism any longer ... The religion lost itself in the maze of mysticism and was engulfed by a host of mudrās (finger-gestures or physical postures), maṇḍalas (mystical diagrams), kriyās (rites and ceremonies), and charyās (meditational practices and observances for external and internal purity). The teachings of one of the noblest minds were thus deformed into a system of magical spells, exorcisms, spirit beliefs and worship of demons and divinities".<sup>1</sup> While this judgement may seem unduly severe, it seems that the apostles of Mahāyāna Buddhism made their religion one which might attract and suit the masses, who were very fond of worshipping personal deities,

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1. H.C.I.P., Vol. IV, p.258, Cf., Farquhar, op.cit., pp. 209f; Dr R. Bhandarkar and others, Ed., B.C. Law Volume, Part 1, pp. 75-87.

as they well understood that the ordinary people could never properly understand any higher philosophy and theology. This revolutionary change in Buddhism was one of the stages in the development of Tāntric Buddhism.

It is believed that many Tāntric rites are older than the time of Buddha.<sup>1</sup> Tradition holds that it was Asaṅga, who may be assigned to the 4th and 5th centuries A.D., who was responsible for the growth of Tāntric Buddhism, which arose out of the yogic practices and esotericism of the Yogaçāra school. This is believed by some scholars.<sup>2</sup> It is even claimed by B. Bhattacharyya that Buddha himself introduced some Tāntric elements into Buddhism; he writes: "Though Buddha himself was antagonistic to all sorts of sacrifices, necromancy, sorcery, or magic, he is credited, nevertheless, with having given instructions concerning Mudrās, Maṇḍalas and Tantras, etc., so that by virtue of these prosperity in this world could be attained by his less advanced disciples, who seemed to care more for this world than for the Nirvāṇa preached by him. India in Buddha's time was so steeped in superstitions that any religion which dared forbid all kinds of magic, sorcery and necromancy could hardly hope to withstand popular

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1. J.R.A.S., 1904, p.557.

2. S.B. Dasgupta, Obscure Religious Cults, pp.17-18.

opposition. A clever organiser as Buddha was, he did not fail to notice the importance of incorporating magical practices in his religion to make it popular from all points of view and attract more adherents thereby."<sup>1</sup> This theory is objected to by S.K.De<sup>2</sup> and S.B.Dasgupta<sup>3</sup>. We have no reference to such practices in the testimony of the Chinese pilgrims who visited India between 400 and 700 A.D.<sup>4</sup> Farquhar holds that the Tantras seem to have taken a definite shape only after the 7th century A.D.<sup>5</sup> But on the basis of the discovery of a Buddhist Tāntric work entitled Ushishaviṣaya-dhāraṇī discovered in the Horiuzi Monastery of Japan and from inscriptional references, N.N. Vasu asserts that the Śakti worship was prevalent throughout India in the 5th century A.D.<sup>6</sup> The same scholar writes that "several images of the Śakti cult were imported into India from countries lying North of the Himalayas. We find the mention of this fact in some of the Tantras. In Rudra-Yāmala and other Hindu Tantras the worship of Tārā is said to have been brought by Vaśiṣṭha from China.

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1. B.Bhattacharyya, An Introduction to Buddhist Esoterism, pp. 48-49.
  2. New Indian Antiquary, Vol.I, p.2 footnote.
  3. S.B.Dasgupta, Obscure Religious Cults, p.19.
  4. New Indian Antiquary, Vol.I, pp.1f.
  5. Farquhar, op.cit., pp.199ff.
  6. Vasu, Archaeological Survey of Mayurabhanja, pp.L-LI



Similarly in the Buddhist Tantra of Nepal called Sāadhanamālā it is mentioned that the worship of Ekajaṭā was brought to India by Nāgārjuna from Bhoṭa or Tibet".<sup>1</sup> The Chinese translation of the Buddha-charita of Aśvaghosha (XIII 21,26) refers to the Tāntric goddess Kālī. It was noticed by Hiuen Tsang that the image of Tārā was being worshipped in India.<sup>2</sup> Thus various scholars have expressed their opinions in regard to the introduction of Tāntric elements into Buddhism. But the final solution of the problem is still shrouded in mystery.

Whatever may have been the date of the introduction of Tāntric elements in Buddhism, these elements became important in Mahāyāna Buddhist circles early in the 8th century, A.D. As a result "their pantheon, characteristic mythology, their transcendental philosophy, their principles of life and of salvation, everything is thrown into topsyturveydom".<sup>3</sup> This view of de la Vallée Poussin was also that of Kern, who wrote: "The decline of Buddhism in India from the 8th century downwards nearly coincides with the growing influence of Tāntrism and sorcery, which stand to each other

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1. Ibid., p.LVIII

2. R.C.Mitra, Decline of Buddhism in India, p.68.

3. Mitra, op.cit., p.65; Cf., de la Vallée Poussin, Bouddhisme, opinion sur l'histoire de la dogmatique, p.397.

in relation of theory to practice".<sup>1</sup> However, during the period between the 8th and 11th centuries Tāntric Mahāyāna Buddhism underwent various changes, from which developed certain other Yānas, such as Mantrayāna, Vajrayāna, Kālachakrayāna and Sahajayāna, having few differences in their metaphysics but considerable distinctions in their practices. All these Yānas lay stress on Haṭha-Yoga. The place of their origin cannot be traced with certainty, but it is generally agreed that most of these later forms of Buddhism developed in the Pāla Empire.<sup>2</sup>

And again Buddhist Tāntrism lays stress upon "the theological principle of duality in non-duality, and holds that the ultimate non-dual reality possesses in its nature the potency of two aspects of attributes ... These two aspects of the absolute reality are conceived as Śiva and Śakti in Brahmanical Tāntrism and Prajñā and Upāya in Buddhist Tāntrism."<sup>3</sup> "The Yogis practices involving the physical and physiological union of the Prajñā and the Upāya lead to the inner union of the two, and through this yogic union is produced supreme bliss (Mahāsukha) which, according to the Buddhist and all other schools of Tantra,

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1. H.Kern, Manual of Indian Buddhism, p.133.

2. N.R.Ray, op.cit., p.639.

3. H.C.I.P., Vol.V, p.407.



is the very nature of the Absolute."<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand, as a result of the fusion of Tāntric Brahmanism and Śāktism on the one side and mystical Buddhism on the other, a new school of Śāktism known as Kaula had its origin in this period. Like the other sects the Kaula school also had its divisions. Among these the most prominent was the Yoginī Kaula, which is believed to have been founded by Matsyendranātha. It is believed by many that this Matsyendranātha is identical with Luipāda, one of the 84 Buddhist Siddhāchānjas. Scholars also hold the view that this mystic Buddhism not only fused with Tāntric Brahmanism and Śāktism but also helped to produce certain other religious groups such as the Nāthas, Avadhūtas, Sahajyās, Bāuls etc. in this period.<sup>2</sup>

Tārānātha tells us that, before the establishment of the Pāla dynasty by Gopāla and during his reign, Buddhism, which had hitherto only been popular through the fostering care of royal support, suffered terribly in Bengal. By this time many Buddhist monasteries and Vihāras were ruined and others were almost in ruins. Those Vihāras which survived

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1. H.C.I.P., Vol.V, p. 409.

2. History of Bengal, Vol.1, pp.422-425; N.R.Ray, op.cit., p.641; D.R.Bhandarkar and others, Ed. B.C.Law Volume, Part 1, pp.82-87; For details see, Kalyani Mallik, Nath Samprādayer Itihāsa, Dharma O Sādhānapranāh; U.N.Bhattacharya, Bānglār Baul O Baul Gan.

were again occupied by the tithikas as their residences.<sup>1</sup> With the establishment of the Pāla rule in Bengal Buddhism became a vital force. Under the direct patronage of the Pāla Kings many Buddhist monasteries and Vihāras were built and old ones were reconstructed. Besides the famous Somapura and Jagaddal, numerous Vihāras were constructed in various parts of Bengal.<sup>2</sup> These monasteries and Vihāras became centres of Buddhist learning and culture. Many teachers known as Siddhas, numbering by tradition, 84 appeared in the period between the 10th and 12th centuries A.D. with certain new mystical ideas and beliefs which helped in the development of the different Buddhist Yānas in this period. Their doctrines were exported from Bengal throughout the whole of India.<sup>3</sup>

It has been proved that almost all the Buddhist images of gods and goddesses found in Bengal may be assigned to between the 9th and the 11th centuries.<sup>4</sup> Ray calls this period "the golden age of Buddhism in Bengal."<sup>5</sup> A good number of Buddhist images, including not only the Buddha

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1. N.R.Ray, op.cit., p.641.

2. History of Bengal, Vol.1, p.417. N.R.Ray, op.cit., pp.632-634.

3. History of Bengal, Vol.1, p.419.

4. N.R.Ray, op.cit., p.649.

5. N.R.Ray, op.cit., p.649.

in various manifestations and poses but also numerous Tāntric goddesses, have been discovered in Bengal and are well preserved in various local museums.<sup>1</sup> Among the female divinities, the different forms of Tārā, e.g. Khadirvanī Tārā, Bhṛikuṭi-Tārā, Vajra-Tāra, Mārīchī, Parṇasavarī, Hārītī, Chuṇḍā, and Prajñāpāramitā, deserve special mention. The Tārās, in their various forms are more numerous than the male divinities, and thus it appears that the worship of the female principle was more widespread and popular than that of the male divinities in Bengal. This also suggests that Bengal has ever been a fertile soil for the growth and development of the Sākta cult.

#### Brahmanical Religion.

It is believed that Vedic and Purāṇic culture first began to have a significant influence on Bengali society from the time of the Guptas; it gathered strength in the Pāla period and became dominant during the time of the Sena and Varman Kings.<sup>2</sup>

#### Vaishnavism.

Among the Brahmanical religions Vaishnavism occupied the first place, as has been proved by epigraphic and iconographic sources. Though the Pālas and the early Senas

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1. History of Bengal, Vol.1, pp.466-474; N.R.Ray, op.cit., 643-649.

2. History of Bengal, Vol.1, pp.396-399.

were Buddhists and Saivas respectively, they both also supported the Vaiṣṇavite cult.<sup>1</sup> The Khālīmpur plate of Dharmapāla records a land grant for a temple of Nanna Nārāyaṇa, and during the reign of Nārāyaṇapāla a Garuḍa pillar was erected. The Deopara stone inscription of Vijayasena records a gift to a temple of Pradyūmnasvara (a special form of Harihara). The discovery of a large number of Viṣṇu images of our period in Bengal clearly indicates the wide popularity of the cult, and this is corroborated by inscripṭional evidence. The usual representation of Viṣṇu is as a standing figure with four hands holding his four well-known attributes. He is also accompanied by his two wives Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī; his vāhana is Garuḍa. Sometimes the Devī Vasumatī and the two door keepers of Vaikuṇṭha, Jaya and Vijaya, also appear.<sup>2</sup> It is believed that it was Bengal Vaiṣṇavism that systematised the theory of avatāras.<sup>3</sup> Jayadeva, the court poet of Lakṣmaṇasena, mentions a list of ten incarnations of Viṣṇu - Matsya, Kurma, Varāha, Narasiṃha, Vāmana, Rāma (Dāśarathī), Paraśu (rāma), Bala (rāma), Buddha and Kalkī.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Ibid., p.401.

2. P.L.Paul, op.cit., Vol.11, p.92; N.R.Ray, op.cit., P.617

3. History of Bengal, Vol.I, p.403.

4. Ibid., Jayadeva in fact believed in eleven avatāras, Kṛiṣṇa, the main subject his poem, not being mentioned in the introductory verses addressed to Viṣṇu.

A few images representing the ten avatāras together have been found in Bengal,<sup>1</sup> and separate images of these incarnations from our period are not lacking.<sup>2</sup>

During the reign of the Senas a new type of Vishṇu image known as Lakshminārāyaṇa was introduced. It is believed by Ray that the conception of this type of image and his worship were brought by the Sena Kings to Bengal from South India, as the Senas worshipped Lakshminārāyaṇa as their tutelary deity.<sup>3</sup> Separate images of Lakshmi and Sarasvatī are not common, but a few such images suggest that both the goddesses were worshipped as independent cult images.<sup>4</sup>

One of the most notable developments of Bengal Vaishṇavism of the 12th century seems to be the clear exposition of the cult of the divine love of Kṛishṇa and Rādhā, as depicted in the Gīta-Govinda of Jayadeva. The origin of this conception cannot be located elsewhere. P.C.Bagchi<sup>5</sup> and Ray<sup>6</sup> suggest that it was of Bengal origin and only began in the

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1. Bhattasali, op.cit., p.80; R.D.Banerji, Eastern Indian School of Mediaeval Sculpture, p.103, Paul, op.cit., Vol.II, pp.92-93.
  2. With the exception of the Buddha and Kalki incarnations, R.D. Banerji, op.cit., pp.103 ff; History of Bengal, Vol.I, pp. 435-437.
  3. N.R.Ray, op.cit., p.660.
  4. History of Bengal, Vol.I, pp.439f.
  5. History of Bengal, Vol.I, p.404.
  6. N.R.Ray, op.cit., p.662.

12th century. N.K.Dikshit attempts to throw further light on this cult and, in a study of Paharpur terracottas, identifies a male and a female figure in an amorous position as Kṛishṇa and Rādhā.<sup>1</sup> But this view is objected to by S.K.Saraswati who suggests that the female figure is either Rukmiṇī or Satyabhāmā.<sup>2</sup> The identification of the latter scholar is supported by Bagchi.<sup>3</sup> The Belāva inscription of Bhojivasman records the amorous activities of Kṛishṇa with a hundred gopīs, without mentioning any particular gopī such as Rādhā. The innovation of Rādhā as the Śakti of Kṛishṇa is indicative of the growing influence of Śāktism in our period. It also points to the time-honoured belief of the masses, whether Hindu or Buddhist, that the supreme reality can only be attained through the Śakti of each divinity. Another interesting feature of Bengal Vaiṣṇavism is the influence of Mahāyāna Buddhism on Viṣṇu images.<sup>4</sup>

### Saivism

Inscriptional evidence and the discoveries of icons give evidence of the condition of Saivism in Bengal during the Pāla-Sena period. Though the Pāla kings were Buddhists,

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1. A.R.A.S.I., 1926-27, pp.142ff. Plate XXXIIC.

2. History of Bengal, Vol.I, p.403, footnote

3. Ibid.,

4. Ibid., pp.433f; N.R.Ray, op.cit., pp.619,660.

a few of them also supported Saivism as they did Vaishnavism. On the other hand most of the Senas were primarily worshippers of Śiva and even Lakshmanasena and his successors, Keśava and Viśvarūpa, who were Vaishnavas, also paid homage to their tutelary deity, Sadāśiva.<sup>1</sup> During this period Śiva was worshipped in various forms, of which Sadāśiva, Chandrasekhara, Nrityamūrti, Ālīngama Chandrasekhara or Umā-Maheśvara, Ardhanārīśvara, Kalyāṇasundara or Śiva-vivāha and Aghara-Rudra types deserve special mention. These images again can be classified under two heads - one representing the saumya or placid aspect of Śiva, and the other his terrific aspect. Still more important and popular was the worship of Śiva as a phallic emblem, a custom which apparently goes back to the Harappa Culture.<sup>2</sup> From the Paharpur excavations many such Sivaelīngas have been discovered. Among them the ekamukha variety is the commonest. Phallic emblems of stone have been discovered not only in Paharpur but also in other parts of Bengal. Images of the placid aspect of Śiva have also been unearthed. It has been suggested that the conception of the Sadāśiva variety of image was brought from South India<sup>3</sup>, but this

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1. History of Bengal, Vol. I, p.405.

2. Karmarkar, op.cit., pp.79-91.

3. J.A.S.B. (N.S.). Vol.XXIX, pp.171 ff.

view is objected to by Banerjea, who strongly suggests its North Indian origin.<sup>1</sup> Our attention is drawn by the *Ālīngana Chandrasēkhara* or *Umā-Maheśvara-mūrti*. The discovery of a good number of images of this type in Bengal suggests that through the influence of the Tāntric cults people worshipped Siva with his Sakti.<sup>2</sup> The *Kalyāṇasundara* or *Siva-vivāha* types of images are few in number, though they are common in South India. A few images of the terrific aspect of Siva as Aghora-Rudra and *Vaṭuka-Bhairava* have been discovered in Bengal.

Mythologically associated members of the family of Siva such as Gaṇapati and Kārtikeya were also worshipped. Many images of Gaṇeśa of various types have been found in Bengal, though there is little evidence that the Gāṇapatya sect was influential there. However, Gaṇeśa was worshipped widely and it has been suggested that "as he was regarded as the remover of all obstacles and bestower of success, he had an assured position not only among the various Brahmanical sectaries, but also, to a lesser extent, even among the followers of some heterodox creeds."<sup>3</sup> Images of Kārtikeya are very rare in Bengal, which suggests that the god was less

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1. History of Bengal, Vol.I, p.444.

2. History of Bengal, Vol.I, pp.444-445; N.R.Ray, op.cit., p.621.

3. Ibid., pp.447f.



important than Gaṇeśa. From the inscriptional evidence it is held that the Pāsupata sect of Saivism was current in Bengal.<sup>1</sup> Saivism was also connected with Śāktism, as many Devī images were worshipped by the people and most of them were thought of as the Śaktis of Śiva. This strong cult of the Śakti seems to be due to the influence of Tantrism which we discuss later.

So far we have discussed the worship of Śiva according to the Vedic and the Purāṇic conceptions. Side by side with this higher conception the village folk of Bengal introduced new elements of popular origin into the character of Śiva, and these can be best illustrated by the songs, relating to him. The earliest reference to the songs of Śiva as a cultivator of the fields is in the Śūnya-Purāṇa<sup>2</sup> whose date has been assigned by Sen and Vasu in the 10th century.<sup>3</sup> On the basis of these songs and the longer poems about Śiva named generically Sivāyana T.W.Clark suggests that the worship of Śiva as a Krishaka-devatā was the earliest form of his cult in Bengal among farming people.<sup>4</sup> He further believes that Śiva in this aspect was of popular origin, and it may be

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1. Ibid., pp.405-406.

2. Ramai Paṇḍit, Śūnya Purāṇa, (Ed. by) N.Vasu, pp.107-114; (Ed. by) C.C.Bandopadhyay, pp.182-185.

3. Sen, H.B.L.L., p.30; Vasu, Archaeological Survey of Mayurabhanja, P.Intro. CXL.

4. B.S.O.A.S., 1955, XVII/3, pp.505-506.

that, even after Aryan influence had made itself felt, this god shared only a name with the Siva of the Purāṇas. Frequent references to the village Siva are made in early popular songs and ballads.<sup>1</sup>

A similar opinion has been expressed by A. Bhattacharya, who thinks that Siva was worshipped as an agricultural deity or as a fertility god in north Bengal from the period when the Aryan culture was felt by the lower classes, who attributed the popular aspect of a fertility god or agricultural deity to the Purāṇic Siva. He argues his view from the present practice of worship of a fertility god named Mahārājā Thākur in north Bengal, especially in the district of Dinajpur among the farming class. He further continues that the name of this Mahārājā is a later coinage and that Siva is identical with this god. He bases this view on the recital of the same popular folk-ballads before both divinities at the time of their worship.<sup>2</sup>

Besides the aspect of an agriculturalist, Siva is depicted in the early mediaeval literature as a man of this world, possessing all the good and bad qualities of a human being. The best example of his human weakness in his love-making with Durgā, when she appeared in the guise of a

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1. This opinion was expressed by Mr. Clark when I personally discussed the matter with him.
  2. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp.101-102.

Bāgadinī woman. The reference to his family as consisting of two sons, two daughters, his beloved wife Umā and two servants also appears in the Sivāyan.<sup>1</sup> He is also depicted in the mediaeval literature as a beggar and an eater of gāñjā and dhāngā. The feature of Siva's love-making, according to D.C.Sen, had its origin to the late Buddhist age, when moral ideas were confused under Tāntric influence.<sup>2</sup>

Clark points out the existence of two different deities named Siva - one of popular origin and worshipped as a krishaka devatā, and the other is of Purānic origin.

Bhattacharya also has suggested that the agricultural aspect of Siva was assimilated to the Purānic deity as a result of popular influence. In our opinion there was a village deity who was worshipped as a Krishaka devatā. This peasant god may well have originally been known by another name, and assimilated to Siva only after the growth of Aryan culture in the rural districts of Bengal. Other aspects of indigenous folk religion were similarly incorporated.

Thus it appears that Siva was worshipped in our period in two different ways by Bengalis - the first non-Aryan and

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1. Rāmeśvar Bhattacharya: Sivāyan, (Ed.by) Nutaluhari Ray.  
 2. D.Sen, H.B.L.L., p.72.

the second Aryan. The present method of the worship of Siva followed at Gājan<sup>1</sup> and other festivals seems to be the earlier non-Aryan way. The popular Siva has ever been a greater force in Bengal than the Purāṇic conception of him or the higher philosophy associated with him. His character as reflected in the Manasākāvyas is of complex nature, containing both Purāṇic and local elements. But Chāndo, the hero of the Manasākāvyas, was a strict devotee of the Purāṇic Siva who blessed Chāndo with the mahājñāna.<sup>2</sup>

Other Brahmanical divinities were not unimportant in the Pāla-Sena period. Among these the Sun-god occupies an important place in iconography. A good number of his images have been discovered in Bengal, but nowadays his worship is almost forgotten. A few images of the hunting god Revanta, son of the Sun-god, and of the Navagrahas, who are associated with the solar cult, have been unearthed from different parts of Bengal. Several images of Brahmā have also been discovered. A composite Brahmā-Vishnu image has been found.<sup>3</sup>

### Jainism:

Jainism, which was once no less popular than other

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1. This is a festival held chiefly by the lower classes in honour of Siva in the month of Chaitra. At it numerous devotees submit to various painful rituals and penances.
  2. Infra, Ch.III. p.143.
  3. History of Bengal, Vol.I, pp.455-459.

religious sects in Bengal, lost its foothold after the 7th century. During the visit of Yuan Chwang there were a good number of Nirgranthas in Bengal.<sup>1</sup> After that there is no direct evidence of them there either in inscriptions or in literature. The only evidence which indicates the survival of the cult is the discovery of a few images of Jaina Tirthankaras. The dates of these have been assigned to the Pāla period.<sup>2</sup> The view that the Nirgrantha religion was not altogether forgotten in Bengal is supported by literary evidence, which records a pilgrimage of Vāstupāla, the minister of the Vāghela king Viradhavala of Gujarat, who was accompanied by the Samghapatis or leading Jaina monks of Lāṭa, Gauḍa, Maru, Dhārā, Avanti and Vaṅga.<sup>3</sup> This evidence suggests that even down to the 13th century there were organised Jaina institutions in Bengal. It has also been suggested that Mallikāryuna Sūri, the 12th century writer on astrology who flourished in Vaṅga, was a Jaina, as he has the title Sūri commonly used by Jaina teachers.<sup>4</sup> This view is objected to by B.Dutta simply because the writer pays homage to the Hindu gods Gaṇapati, Viṣṇu and Kṛiṣṇa.<sup>5</sup>

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1. P.L.Paul, op.cit., p.73; History of Bengal, p.410.

2. Ibid., p.71, History of Bengal, pp. 464-465; N.R.Ray, op.cit., p.650.

3. P.L.Paul, op.cit., p.71; N.R.Ray, op.cit., p.650.

4. Paul, op.cit., pp.69-70.

5. Ibid., p.70 (footnote)

The former hypothesis<sup>is</sup>/more probable, as there is much evidence that in our period the adherents of one religion payed homage to another. The three gods mentioned are respected by Jains to this day. In any case there is enough evidence to show that a section of the people, however small, was attached to this faith.

N.R. Ray suggests that probably during the Pāla period a few of the Jaina Bhikshus and Upāsakas were converted to the Buddhist faith and the rest were merged with the Kāpālikas and Avadhūtas in the later period.<sup>1</sup> Jainism did not escape Tāntric influence. B.C. Bhattacharya notes that the Svetāmbara sect worshipped Kuladevīs or Tāntric goddesses, whose numbers vary in the different texts.<sup>2</sup> He adds that "this predominant Tāntrik element in Iconography seems to be represented by the Svetāmbara sect, who like the Mahāyāna Buddhists, developed by assimilation and invention, a Tantrik system of their own".<sup>3</sup>

### Tāntrism.

We have already mentioned that one of the most important features of this period was the growth and influence of the Tāntric cult on all contemporary religious sects.

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1. N.R. Ray, op.cit., p.612.

2. Bhattacharya, The Jaina Iconography, p.23.

3. Ibid., pp.23f.

It has been said by H.P.Sastri that "the word Tantra is very loosely used. Ordinarily people understand by it any system other than the Vedas ... The union of male and female energy is the evidence of Tantra."<sup>1</sup> But Winternitz is of the opinion that the term "Tantra ought to be restricted to the texts connected with Sakti worship".<sup>2</sup> Of course this is the main aspect of Tāntrism, which emphasizes prakṛiti or the female principle. Other topics are also discussed in the Tantras, such as the creation myth, customs to be followed in society, royal duties, the curing of diseases and characteristic features of the male and female.<sup>3</sup> H. Kern writes: "The development of Tāntrism is a feature that Buddhism and Hinduism in their later phases have in common. The object of Hindu Tāntrism is the acquisition of wealth, mundane enjoyments, rewards for moral actions, deliverance, by worshipping Durgā, the Śakti of Śiva - Prajñā in the terminology of Mahāyāna - by means of spells, muttered prayers, samādhi, offerings etc. Similarly the Buddhist Tantras purpose to teach the adepts how by a supernatural way to acquire desired objects, either of a material nature,

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1. Vasu, Modern Buddhism in Orissa, Intro. by H.P.Sastri, p.10.

2. I.H.Q., Vol. IX, p.4.

3. Paul, op.cit., p.76.

such as the elixir of longevity, invulnerability, invisibility, alchemy; or of a more spiritual character as the power of evoking a Buddha or of a Bodhisattva to solve a doubt or the power of achieving in this life the union with some divinity. There is an unmistakable affinity between Tāntrism on one side and the system of Yoga and Kammattthana on the other."<sup>1</sup> Tāntrism has generally been predominant in most of the Indian systems of religion in Bengal and Assam from the 8th century onwards till the present century.

With regard to the priority of the Hindu and Buddhist Tantras and their antiquity great uncertainty still prevails. A group of scholars including N. Macnicol,<sup>2</sup> M.T. Kennedy<sup>3</sup> and H.P. Sastri<sup>4</sup> asserts the priority of the Buddhist Tantras, and for them "it was by the way of Buddhism that Tāntric practices gained a foothold in Hinduism." This view is strongly championed by S.K. Chatterjee who observes: "... in Tāntrik Buddhism, the Tāntrik symbolism and practices found another and a potent channel through which it (sic) could exert an indirect but nevertheless very effective influence Purāṇic Brahmanism. Present-day Brahmanism in Bengal may be characterised as more than three-fourths

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1. Kern, Manual of Indian Buddhism, p.133.

2. N. Macnicol, Indian Theism, p.182.

3. M.T. Kennedy, The Chaitanya Movement, p.3.

4. Vasu, Modern Buddhism in Orissa, p. Intro. 27.



Tāntric in its inspiration, outlook and ritual, and less than one-fourth Vedic, with a Purāṇic background: and the greatest legacy of Buddhism in Bengal, in its latest phase before it died out officially or formally, has been the Tantric attitude and atmosphere".<sup>1</sup> But this view has been objected to by other scholars such as E.A. Payne,<sup>2</sup> Burnouf<sup>3</sup> and de la Vallée Poussin,<sup>4</sup> who are of the opinion that it was on the basis of Saiva Tantras that the Buddhist Tantras grew up, by borrowing not only the language but also the rites and practices of the Saivas. De la Vallée Poussin goes further to state that Buddhist Tāntrism may be called "practically Buddhist Hinduism, Hinduism, or Saivism in Buddhist garb."<sup>5</sup> In this respect S.B. Dasgupta's theory draws our attention. He boldly asserts that "Tantricism with its heterogeneous nature is neither exclusively Hindu, nor exclusively Buddhist in origin".<sup>6</sup> It is also ~~believed~~ that both the Tantras drew their inspiration from one common source of very early origin under the same socio-religious background.<sup>7</sup> As they borrowed from the one stock, there

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1. B.C.Law Volume, part 1, p.82.

2. E.A. Payne, The Śāktas, p.73.

3. E.Burnouf, Introduction a l'histoire du Bouddhisme Indien, p.492

4. E.R.E., Vol. XII, pp.193 ff.

5. Ibid., p.193.

6. Dasgupta, Obscure Religious Cults, p.20.

7. Ibid., p.20; R.C.Mitra, op.cit., p.71; A.Foucher, Iconographie Bouddhique, Part II, p.105.

seems to have been no clear line of demarcation between the two Tantras. However, in many respects the Tāntric forms of both Hinduism and Buddhism are similar. Dasgupta further believes that the early Āgamic texts are the basis of later Tāntric texts. He supports his theory from the Tantrāloka of Abhinavagupta (10th century A.D.) where the author openly admits as its basis the Āgamas which existed during the time of Somānanda and Utpala.<sup>1</sup>

As regards the antiquity of the Tantras C. Chakravarty points out that many rites and practices similar to those described in the Tantras were quite familiar to the primitive peoples of all countries.<sup>2</sup> Some scholars are of the opinion that the Aryans borrowed the primitive rites from the Dravidian or other non-Aryan peoples and through a gradual process of assimilation systemetised them for their own purposes, with the addition of many later practices.<sup>3</sup> It has been suggested that Assam and Bengal were the birthplaces of Tāntrism in India and from there it spread all over India<sup>4</sup>. Smith points out that Kāmarūpa "is a gate through which successive hordes of immigrants from the great hive of the

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1. Dasgupta, Obscure Religious Cults, P. 20

2. I.H.Q., Vol. VI, p.117.

3. Ibid.

4. Payne, op.cit., p. 69

Mongolian race in Western China have poured into the plains of India, and many of the resident tribes are still almost pure Mongolians. The religion of such tribes is of more than of local concern, because it supplies the clue to the strange Tāntric development of both Buddhism and Hinduism, which are so characteristic of mediaeval and modern Bengal."<sup>1</sup> This view is corroborated by the evidence of Tantras which point to the importation of Tārā worship from China to India and which we discuss below.

It is believed by Prof. R. Shamasastri, with the partial support of Bruce Foot, that the Tāntric form of worship was prevalent in prehistoric India.<sup>2</sup> But C. Chakravarty maintains that Tāntrism originated chiefly from Vedic religion.<sup>3</sup> This view is supported by René Guenon, who is of the opinion that the doctrine of the Tantras is nothing but what is already contained in the Vedas and that "as for the means of realisation (sādhana) prescribed by the Tantras, by the same token they can be said to be directly derived from the Veda, for they are really only the application and the putting into practice of this doctrine."<sup>4</sup> The same view is championed by P.C. Bagchi,<sup>5</sup>

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1. Quoted by Payne, The Sāktās, p.69.

2. I.A., Vol.35, 1906, pp.274ff; I.H.Q., Vol.VI, pp.117-118.

3. I.H.Q. Vol.VI, 1930, pp.118-122.

4. I.C., Vol. V, 1938-1939, pp.91-92.

5. R.C. Mitra, op.cit., pp.69-70.

who asserts that the fundamental attitude of both Tantric and Vedic religions is the same and that the Tāntric cult had its origin in the Vedic religion. This school of thought argues in favour of the Vedic origin of Tāntrism as some features of Tāntrism are clearly found in the Vedas. However, it is to be noted that references to many mystic rites and practices which are similar or very close to Tāntric rites are also made in Buddhist and Jaina canonical works.<sup>1</sup> From this we can well infer the heterogenous nature of Tāntrism. Thus it is not wise to assume that it originated solely from the Vedas or from any other single source. There may have been some similarity between certain Vedic rites and others in the Tantras, but that does not mean that Tāntrism grew up from Vedic sources.

There is also a contradictory theory. It is suggested by N.N.Vasu<sup>2</sup> that the Tāntric or Śākta cult had a foreign origin, as is evident from the verses in the Kulālikāmnāya or Kubjikāmata Tantra (circa, 5th century A.D.) and Mahāchīnachārasāra Tantra. Evidence is not wanting to show that the Tārā cult was imported from China, as we have a reference to the peculiar practice of using the twig of a tree in her worship, a custom unknown to the Indians.<sup>3</sup>

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1. I.H.Q., Vol.VI, pp.122-125.

2. Vasu, Archaeological Survey of Mayurabhanja, pp.liii-liv.

3. I.H.Q., Vol. XII, 1936, p.206.

Bagchi<sup>1</sup> propounds the theory of the foreign origin of Indian Tantras from different evidence. He divides the Tantras into two groups - Orthodox and heterodox. The orthodox Tantras include the Āgamas, the Yāmālas and their supplements. The heterodox Tantras of Buddhist and Brahmanical origin are the works of Tāntric schools such as Vajrajāna, Sahajayāna, Kulāchāra, Vāmāchāra, etc. According to Bagchi it was into the heterodox Tantras that many of the mystical practices of foreign origin were absorbed. The theory of the foreign origin of a few Tāntric goddesses such as Kubjikā and Tārā cannot be ignored. The influence of foreign elements, especially from China, on Indian Tantras has been noticed by H.P. Sastri, Bagchi, Lévi and others.

Needham,<sup>2</sup> on the basis of certain similarities between Tāntrism and Taoism, suggests the possibility of Taoism having been exported from China to India, where subsequently it appeared in the form of Tāntrism. This view is supported by Mitra who writes that "it is not improbable that Taoism, which had become a mixture of magic rites and philosophical doctrines, travelled by way of Kucha or Central India, and

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1. Bagchi, Studies in the Tantras, pp.45-55.

2. Needham, Science and Civilization in China, Vol.II, pp.427-428.

mingled with Indian Agamas and primitive cults to produce that system of thought and rituals known as the Tantra."<sup>1</sup> But it is equally likely that, if there was Taoist influence, it came, as Smith suggested, by way of Assam. Taoist sages and adepts were inclined, like the traditional Lao-tse, to retire to remote and mountainous country. From Szechwan a rather difficult route led to Assam, and here Taoist and Hindu sages may have met. It is noteworthy that Bhāskaravarman, the 7th century king of Assam, is recorded as requesting the Chinese envoy Wang-~~2~~süan-tse to obtain for him a Sanskrit translation of the Taoteh king. However we are not inclined to accept the view that Tāntrism in India is nothing but Tāoism in a new garb. It has been shown that Tāntrism also contains features which seem to have originated in the Vedas, Buddhism and Jainism. Thus it is a form of religion which grew up to meet the needs of society by borrowing and absorbing from different sources according to the demands of the masses of a particular zone or locality.

For our purposes the history of Tāntrism is very significant, in that the folk tales of Bengal, which seem to have originated between the 8th to 12th centuries, did not escape from Tāntric influences. Several examples are given

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1. Mitra, op.cit., p.71.

by Dasgupta.<sup>1</sup> Maynāmati of the Mānik Chandra Rājār-Gān is said to have spent seven days and nights in the midst of fire without being burnt. In the Bengali Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata of Kṛittivāsa and Kāśīrām Das respectively there are many references to the miraculous feats performed by the characters of the epics. In the former Rāvaṇa is referred to as cutting off his ten heads, one after another, to propitiate the goddess Durgā. The sorceries exhibited by Mahīrāvaṇa are also to be remembered. In the latter epic reference is made to Sudhanvā as being unburnt after spending days and nights in burning oil. None of these features occur in the original epics. These are the innovations of poets who could not ignore the influence of time-honoured Tāntric practices.

Like Maynāmati and other characters of Bengali legends, Behulā, one of the central figures of the Manasākāvya, has also been pictured as a Tāntricist who performed many miraculous feats. Both Behulā and Lakhindar supernaturally preserved themselves from death in the face of a number of humanly impossible ordeals.<sup>2</sup> Thus magic and sorcery, which are among the characteristic elements of Tāntrism, are also found in the Manasākāvyas.

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1. T.C.Dasgupta, Aspects of Bengali Society from Old Bengali Literature, pp.154-155.
  2. Infra, Chapter III.

It is further observed by Dasgupta that "when Tāntrikism took a deep root in the country it was believed that man was superior to gods .... The idea of salvation through individual efforts was so much emphasised in Tāntrikism that a man's power was considered almost unlimited, provided he could pass through austerities, prescribed in the different Tantras."<sup>1</sup> In the Manasākāvyas Chāndo continually challenges the superiority of the goddess Manasā. The glorification of man's power is found there. And Chāndo had the power to challenge the goddess only because he was the possessor of mahājñāna. This power, which he earned from Siva through his extreme austerities, made him not only immortal but also unconquerable, like Maynāmatī. This feature of the legend suggests that one of its bases was a story about a great Tāntric magician and holy man named Chāndo. His final surrender to the goddess seems to be of later coinage, at a time when the influence of Tāntrism was losing ground in Bengali society. Siva is said to have trembled "in fear at the mention of Maynāmatī, on account of the Mahājñāna, acquired by her by means of Tāntric practices. He is described as having said to the subjects of King Marikchandra, "Do not divulge my name to

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1. Dasgupta, Aspects of Bengali Society, p.160.



Maynāmati, for if you do so, she will destroy my Kailāsa.<sup>1</sup> Similarly Manasā trembled in fear of Chāndo's supreme power.<sup>2</sup> We are even told in our texts that Chāndo went so far as to injure Manasā's waist with his ṛematāla staff.<sup>3</sup> Thus the influence of Tāntrism was predominant in our period. It is believed that Tāntrism, which seems abstruse now, was so widely current in society that "it was more or less understood even by the illiterate country-folk in the 9th and 10th centuries".<sup>4</sup> Thus the characteristic features of the legendary figures of the Manasākāya also suggest the strong influence of Tāntric ideas on the society of the time.

### Sāktism.

Sāktism has long played an important rôle in Bengal religion. According to Sāktism the chief God is the Supreme Mother. The worship of this Supreme Mother is of remote antiquity in India. On the discoveries of female statuettes at Mohenjo Daro and Harappa, Marshall has remarked that "in no country in the world has the worship of the Divine Mother been from time immemorial so deep-rooted and ubiquitous as in India. Her shrines are found in every town and hamlet throughout the length and breadth of the land."<sup>5</sup> It has been suggested that the female divinity

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1. Dasgupta, Aspects of Bengali Society, p.160.
  2. Bijay Gupta, Padma-Purāṇa, (Ed.by) B.K.Bhattacharya, p.108; Nārāyaṇ Deb, Padma-Purāṇa, (Ed.by) T.C.Dasgupta, p.63.
  3. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., p.228; Nārāyaṇ Deb, op.cit., p.127.
  4. Dasgupta, Aspects of Bengali Society, p.160.
  5. Marshall, Mohenjo Daro and the Indus Civilization, Vol.1, p.51.

of the Indus Valley period becomes "the Mother' or 'Great Mother' and 'prototype of the female power (prakṛiti) which developed into that of Śakti."<sup>1</sup> Śāktism implies the worship of the active female principle, which manifests itself primarily in one or other forms of the consort of Śiva - Durgā, Kālī, Pārvatī and many others. It has been pointed out by Marshall in connection with the female statuettes already mentioned that "their central figure is a mother or Nature Goddess, who, out of her own being, creates her partner, God, just as the Indian Mother Goddess creates Śiva, and then in union with him becomes the Mother of all things. Like the Mahādevi of the Śāktas, she is at once beneficent and malignant, averter of evils but herself a dread power; ruler of passions and appetites, and mistress of magic and sorceries; and her ritual is characterised by sexual promiscuity and sacrifices of a specially sanguinary character."<sup>2</sup>

Though the worship of the female energy can be traced back to the Indus Valley period, the Aryāns who invaded the country never emphasised the worship of female deities, who, with the exception of the Dawn (Ushā), play little or

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1. Ibid., cf. Gustav Oppert, The Original Inhabitants of Bharatavarsha or India, pp. 449, 450, 504.

2. Marshall, op.cit., Vol. 1, p.58.

no part in the Vedas except as mere wives of their husbands. An invocation to the Divine Energy (Śakti), however, occurs in the Rig-Veda (Devī-Sūkta, Rv. X.125). Starbuck suggests that "the Vedas were written before and during the period when the Aryans were conquering the aborigines of India and were engaged in feuds among their own tribes. Under such conditions there are no goddesses although the literature is polytheistic. Since the nation has settled down into a relatively peaceful life and agricultural pursuits, the worship of female deities has risen to a place of supreme importance; Durgā, the spirit of Nature and Spring; Kālī, the soul of infinity and eternity; Sarasvati, supreme wisdom; Śakti, mother of all phenomena".<sup>1</sup> Thus slowly the Śakti cult embraced the higher classes within its fold and in its developed form it appears for the first time in the epics and the Purāṇas.

The history of Śāktism is linked closely with that of Śaivism. "... just as Śiva has 1008 names or epithets," says Monier Williams, "so his wife possesses a feminine duplicate of nearly every one of his designations. At least one thousand distinct appellations are assigned to her, some expressive of her benignant, some of her ferocious

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1. E.R.E., Vol. V, p.282.

character."<sup>1</sup>

The Śākta cult appeared in various forms in different areas of India at the close of the Vedic period. One of its popular aspects is the Grāmadevatās. Marshall writes: "Her representatives are the Grāmadevatās, the village-goddesses whose names are legion and whose local attributes may vary, but who one and all are personifications of the same power ... There can be no question that they held a pre-eminent position among the national deities of the non-Aryan population. This is indicated alike by the popularity of their cult among the primitive tribes, and by the fact that the leading parts in their ritual and ceremonies are taken, not by Brahmans, but by low caste Pariahs - members of some of the old tribes who are supposed to know how to win the ear of the goddess."<sup>2</sup> A Grāmadevatā is the "tutelary deity" or "protecting mother" of a particular locality, or in certain cases a caste. These Grāmadevatās have a peculiar attraction for the village folk, presumably from a very early period, and they are commonly worshipped in many places on the outbreak of a calamity or epidemic and on the occasions of marriage, child birth and so on. How they are

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1. Monier Williams, Brahmanism and Hinduism, p.187.

2. Marshall, op.cit., Vol. 1, p.51.

worshipped is described in the Grāmadevatā - pratishtā:

"Vaishṇava people worship the goddess in the centre of the hamlet, Śāktas do so outside it, Kāpālikas on the burning ground, Gāṇapatās at the house-door or at the house-pillar, and other, with the exception of the merchants, revere her in the bazaar street. All, however, can adore her near a waterside, in a forest, or in a stone, wooden or clay temple".<sup>1</sup>

The linguistic and ethnological evidence indicates that the Bengali seems to be mixture of four races - Kol, Dravidian, Mongolian and Aryan.<sup>2</sup> It is observed: "that many of the characteristic Śākta practices and beliefs are traceable to the Dravidian and Mongolian peoples, and that they passed into Hinduism by a natural upward transition, as aboriginal, non-Aryan and casteless tribes adopted officially the religion of those immediately above them in the social scale."<sup>3</sup> Literary evidence indicates that the Śākta cult became popular in Bengal from the 6th and 7th centuries.<sup>4</sup> On the other hand, it has been suggested that it was only from the Gupta period that Bengal came fully under the influence of Aryan civilization. This process of Aryanisation continued

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1. Oppert, op.cit., p.459.

2. History of Bengal, p.449.

3. Payne, op.cit., p.84.

4. Payne, op.cit., p.85.

for some centuries, as in the other parts of India.

The Bengalis may be broadly grouped into two - the first comprising primitive people such as the Kōls, Savaras, Hāḍis, Doms, Pulindas, Chāṇḍālas and others styled Mlecchas; and the second containing the higher class people of the prevalent caste groupings.<sup>1</sup> On present day analogy, we may assume that there was always a great contrast in all respects between these two groups living side by side. The first had very little to do with the superior deities of Hinduism, Buddhism and Jainism, who were generally worshipped by upper classes. The commons paid their respects to the Grāmadevatās of local origin. It is suggested by N.R. Ray<sup>2</sup> that in the early period of our history the Grāmadevatās of the pre-Aryan people were never worshipped by upper classes with the officiation of Brahman priests, as Manu ordains that the Brahmans who participated in the worship of such divinities had to live as outcastes from their community. But the upper classes could not wean the people away from their ardent ancestral attachment to those deities of popular origin. This argument is not, however, wholly conclusive, since Manu is not a product of Bengal, and many centuries must have passed before the instructions of the text were accepted

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1. History of Bengal, pp. 557 ff.

2. N.R. Ray, op.cit., p.579.

throughout India. Moreover to this day Brahmans often perform rites connected with village deities, and are not ostracised by their community for doing so. On the other hand Ray<sup>1</sup> further adds that the Maṅgalkāvyas and other evidence indicate that many of the deities of non-Aryan origin such as Manasā, Ban-; Durgā, Sītalā, Shashthī, different types of Chaṇḍī, Saśān-kālī, and Jāṅgulī were absorbed into the Brahmanical and Buddhist pantheons. We have already noticed that Bengal has ever been the fertile land for the origination of deities particularly of female ones, and during the Pāla-Sena period innumerable divinities of local origin took their birth in Bengal. The old and mediaeval Bengali literature bears out the truth of this, reflecting the struggle between the worshippers of local goddesses and the more orthodox Hindus.

Bengal did not become a stronghold of Brahmanical Hinduism until at least the 11th century. For a few centuries before that time Tāntric Buddhism seems to have been the most prominent religion. It is thought that in the Pāla period local beliefs began to be mixed up with the Mahāyāna Buddhism of Bengal and out of the intermixture many local gods and goddesses arose.<sup>2</sup> Thus "the illiterate villagers

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1. N.R. Ray, op.cit., p.579.

2. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., p.2.

of Bengal worshipped many gods and goddesses under the influence of Tāntrik Buddhism, and the Hindu priests gradually took these up, and associating them with the deities of the Hindu pantheon as related in the Purāṇas, Hinduised the whole spiritual atmosphere of Bengal. They connected the fables current in the country with the Sastrik stories and thus bridged over a gap, created by the loss of Buddhist ascendancy and its traditions in Bengal."<sup>1</sup> This observation of D.C. Sen is not wholly true when he speaks of the worship of deities by the village folk under the influence of Tāntric Buddhism alone. It seems more probable that the village folk worshipped deities of popular origin which had little or nothing to do with the higher conceptions of either Buddhist or Brahmanical religion. Some Tāntric influences can be detected but there are not sufficient grounds to think that these popular deities grew up under the influence of Tāntric Buddhism alone. Sen's argument has not been strengthened by examples or illustrations. It was under the Senas that Brahmanism began to exert a great influence over the socio-religious life of the people. But the deep-rooted religious beliefs and practices which had arisen in the Pāla period or earlier could not be eradicated. Thus the

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1. D.Sen, H.B.L.L., p.378.



current religion practised widely by the common people underwent some change in accordance with the spirit of the age and the needs of society. Their mind is always in favour of some sort of harmonious co-operation between the old and the new and "this contact of the popular faith with the new creed, that was being introduced, created a strange force, which is to be observed in a growing literary activity all over the country ... the literature of Paurāṇik Renaissance, while showing an unmistakable rebirth of Sanskrit ideals, had a place reserved for popular creeds and also for the stories current in the country, which the Brahmanic school presented in a new and attractive garb."<sup>1</sup> This idea had its best expression in the old and mediaeval Bengali poetry written between circa 1300-1800 A.D., in praise of deities of local origin such as Manasā, Maṅgal Chaṇḍī, Dharma, Śitalā and others.

We have already said that one of the important characteristics of this period is the process of assimilation of the deities of different religious systems. The Buddhists borrowed Hindu deities such as Indra, Gaṇapati, Sarasvatī, Mahākāla, Nilakaṇṭha and Vighṇanāṭaka.<sup>2</sup> One of the forms of Avalokiteśvara with five heads very closely resembles

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1. Sen, H.B.L.L., p.379.

2. B.Bhattacharyya, The Indian Buddhist Iconography, P.Forward.1.

Siva as the five-headed Mahādeva.<sup>1</sup> A standing image of the same deity resembles the usual Viṣṇu images.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand the Hindus also borrowed Buddhist deities such as Chāmūṇḍā, Vāśulī, Tārā, Kālī, Kṣhetrapāla, Bhadrakālī and Mañjuśhoṣa.<sup>3</sup> Reference to Mahāyāna deities such as Amoghasiddhi, Akṣobhya, Paṇḍarā and Kurukullā is made in the orthodox Hindu Tantras.<sup>4</sup> It is further suggested that the Buddhist goddesses Jāṅgulī, Mahāchīnatārā and Vajrayoginī were prototypes of those known in the Hindu pantheon as Manasā, Tārā and Chhinnamastā respectively.<sup>5</sup> The figures of Viṣṇu in meditative pose and in Lokēśvara form and those of Dhyaṇi Siva suggest their origin from the conception of Dhyaṇi Buddha.<sup>6</sup> This process of assimilation strongly indicates the establishment of friendly relationships at a certain period among the people of the two religious sects. It has been observed by Ray<sup>7</sup> that though there may have been disagreement between the leaders of the two sects, a conscious attempt was made at co-operation, and that there seems to have been no quarrell among the

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1. A. Getty, The Gods of Northern Buddhism, p.56.

2. Mitra, op.cit., p.63.

3. Mitra, op.cit., p.59.

4. Mitra, op.cit., p.59.

5. Bhattacharyya, The Indian Buddhist Iconography, P.Forward 1.

6. N.R. Ray, op.cit., p.670.

7. Ibid.

laity. It was their efforts which helped the process of unification in religious matters. This scholar supports his view from a Buddhist stotra in the Sādhana-mālā, addressed to Tārādevī, where Tārā, Umā, Padmāvatī and Vedamātā are conceived as one and the same. He further suggests that there was a tendency to make little or no distinction in rites and ceremonies or in the conception of images and in their worship between the Buddhist and Brahmanical religions.<sup>1</sup> The conclusion, though broadly correct, may be rather too sweeping. The opposition of Śaṅkara and other teachers of his time to Buddhism is well known. Moreover there is in Nālandā Museum a large fragmentary figure of the Mahāyāna deity Trailokyavijaya trampling on Śiva and Pārvatī (Plate-21).

The importance of this discussion on the assimilation of deities between the different religious systems lies in the fact that Manasā, the subject of our study, is believed to have originated from goddesses of both Buddhism and Hinduism.<sup>2</sup>

We have given so much space to the consideration of this topic, because a careful study of the legends concerning

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1. N.R. Ray, op.cit., p.671.

2. Infra, Chapter VII.

Manasā suggests that the goddess is of a complex nature which can be properly understood only against the background of the religious history of early Bengal.

### CHAPTER III

#### A Comparative study of the stories of Manasā.

The present study of the cult of Manasā is based principally on the stories concerning that goddess which are found in long narrative poems written in the Bengali, the Assamese and the Bihari languages. Though these stories constitute the main source of information on the subject, reference is also necessary to the Brahmavaivarta and Devī-Bhāgavata Purāṇas, which contain some material relevant to the subject. The Purāṇas, however, cannot be dated earlier than the 15th century and, therefore, are to be regarded as secondary sources.

#### A. BENGAL

There are many Manasā manuscripts written by many poets. Some of these have not been edited and some are not easily accessible. This study is based on the most important and most thoroughly representative of the Manasākāvyas namely those by Bipradās, Nārāyaṇ Deb, Bijay Gupta, Baṃśīdās, Ketakādāś-Kshemānanda and Jagajjīban.<sup>1</sup>

1. For details of these poets see Appendix A, pp. 512-514.

As already observed<sup>1</sup> none of the manuscripts as extant were written during the life time of the poet. Some interpolations and alternations in the original composition of the poet are to be expected. Nevertheless, a critical study of the existing versions helps us to stratify the materials, to distinguish between earlier and later compositions, and to ascertain the probable original skeleton of the stories.

The story told by Bipradās is narrated here in detail, because, as it is rightly observed: "The story of Manasā is narrated by Vipradās as a unitary narrative, the different episodes having been given a balanced and proportionate treatment . . . . On reading the poem one is convinced that Vipradās has given us an old, genuine and simple version of the Manasā saga."<sup>2</sup>

The entire version of Bipradās is divided into sections. The versions of the other poets are mentioned only when there are significant divergences from that of Bipradās. The story according to Bipradās is as follows.<sup>3</sup>

# I.

The Universe and all its inhabitants emerges out of the unknown. After the birth of the daityas (demons), they began to worship Maheśvara (Śiva). The god Nārāyaṇa

1. Supra, pp. 11-12.

2. Bipradās' Manasā-Bijay, (Ed. by) Sukumar Sen, Intro. p. v.

3. Ibid., pp. 1-235.

subdued the demons (probably for their impertinence). This victory over the demons was followed by a feast known as daitya-sui-mahāvajña. At the request of the gods Śiva was asked to bring Gaṅgā to do the cooking. He went to the āśrama of the sage Sāntanu who allowed his wife Gaṅgā to cook at the feast on the understanding that she would be sent back before nightfall, as otherwise he would not accept her. As it happened the feast did not end until very late at night and Gaṅgā stayed there till daybreak, when she was brought back to Sāntanu. He refused to accept her. Gaṅgā returned with Śiva, who had to keep her in his house.

Śiva began to practise austerities on the bank of the Ballukā in order to obtain a sight of Dharma Niranjana. These austerities continued for twelve years. After this period one day Dharma who had a white umbrella above his head and who was riding on an owl, came to the house of Śiva. Dharma called out but Śiva was away and it was Gaṅgā who responded and came out. As soon as she saw Dharma, her complexion and dress turned white and Dharma instructed her to let Śiva know that he had come to see him. Gaṅgā requested him to pay another visit, so that Śiva, who had been practising hard penance only to have a sight of him, might see him. Dharma answered her that the same merit of seeing him would be

attained by Śiva when he looked at Gaṅgā. He also added that if Śiva was still not satisfied, he was to pluck flowers at Kālidaha, where he would be able to see the manifestation of a heavenly damsel. Śiva returned and was amazed to see Gaṅgā all white and sitting on a white bedstead. He was told everything by Gaṅgā including Dharma's instructions. He lamented that he had not had the opportunity of seeing Dharma, who had so kindly come to see him, and he told Gaṅgā that she was indeed fortunate. The news of Dharma's visit to Śiva's house and of the change of Gaṅgā's complexion spread all around, and all the gods and goddesses came to see her.

Then Śiva followed the instructions of Dharma, and, while still practising penance, he used to go to pluck flowers at Kālidaha. Out of feminine curiosity one day Gaurī (Chandī) expressed the desire to go with Śiva, just to know where her husband went every day and what he did there. Śiva restrained her, saying that the lake Kālidaha was infested with snakes. Gaurī agreed, but secretly she followed Śiva in the guise of a dom girl beautifully dressed and ornamented, thinking that her husband was intentionally avoiding her. She stationed herself as a ferry woman in a boat on the river Jokā which one had to cross while going to Kālidaha. Śiva came and asked the ferry woman to carry him across. He



fell in love with the dom girl at first sight and proposed to enjoy her. Gaurī vehemently protested on the ground that she was a woman of low origin, whereas Śiva was a great god, as he himself said. But finally Śiva purchased her beauty at the price of a diamond ring.

After that Gaurī revealed herself and berated Śiva for his licentious behaviour. Śiva made a plan to humiliate Gaurī for thus humiliating him. He became a mouse and chewed her bodice. Then Śiva in the guise of an old itinerant tailor appeared in his own house and Chāṇḍī engaged him to darn the bodice, promising to pay him well. When the work was done the tailor refused to be satisfied until Chāṇḍī had allowed herself to be enjoyed by him. Then Śiva threw off his disguise and berated Chāṇḍī as she had done him.

## II.

Days passed and one fine morning Śiva saw the birds mating at Kālidaha. He was excited at this sight and he cast his semen upon a lotus leaf. The semen was eaten by a male crow but he was unable to retain it. As advised by his wife he disgorged it on the same lotus leaf from which he had taken it. It then went down through the stalk and reached Pātāla, the kingdom of Vāsuki. There it fell like a thunderbolt on the head of Vāsuki. His

mother, one of the sculptors among the Nāgas, realised that the seed belonged to Śiva. She therefore fashioned an image of a beautiful girl, which came to life when touched by Śiva's seed. The girl was named Manasā. Vāsuki's mother introduced Manasā to Vāsuki who accepted her as his sister and gave her charge of the entire stock of poison that was produced when King Prithu milked the Earth as a cow. Then Manasā held sway over the snakes, living at Kālidaha with the snake attendants. She played on the waters of the lake and in consequence all the flowers died. Śiva became very angry because he could not get flowers as before. So he asked Garuḍa to rid the waters of the lake of the snakes, so that the flowers might grow as before. The female snake Kālī reported the attack to Manasā, who appeared before Śiva to get him to restrain Garuḍa. Śiva fell in love with her at first sight. Being terrified at his look, Manasā told the story of her birth to him and proved that he was her father. She wanted to accompany him to his home. Śiva did not agree to her proposal as he knew well the character of his beloved wife Chāṇḍī. But at her earnest request he took her concealed in his flower basket. Śiva came to his house and went out again, placing the flower basket in a corner of the room. This made Chāṇḍī

suspicious. She found Manasā in the basket and abused her in filthy language, as she suspected her of being a concubine of Śiva. Manasā protested, but without any effect.

Then Manasā told the story of her birth and addressed her as stepmother. But Chaṇḍī was still suspicious. This irritated Manasā who replied hotly. Chaṇḍī lost her temper and jabbed a kuśā needle into Manasā's eye. Manasā took revenge by flashing her great power over Chaṇḍī from her other eye. Chaṇḍī fell down senseless. The news was reported by Ganeśa and Kārttikeya to their father Śiva. Śiva came and at his request Manasā looked again at Chaṇḍī, who then sat up. Then followed another quarrel between them. Chaṇḍī finally informed Śiva that she would not allow Manasā to stay at home. Śiva went out with Manasā to fix up a place for residence.

Before her departure, Manasā gave Chaṇḍī her signet with five jewels and asked her to call when Śiva was in any danger. Śiva and Manasā walked further and further and finally they came to Sijuyā hill where they rested. This hill was covered with sij trees. Being exhausted, Manasā suddenly fell asleep under a sij-tree. This gave Śiva the opportunity to leave her, but before

going he wept. From his tear-drops a girl named Neto was born. When Śiva was about to leave the place, Neto requested him not to go. Śiva taught Neto the mahājñāna and asked her to stay with Manasā as her attendant. Then he left the place and after going some distance he thought to himself that it was not proper to leave these two girls in such a lonely forest. This thought brought out sweat on his forehead and from his own sweat he created Dhāmāi, who was instructed by Śiva to guard Manasā and Neto. When Manasā woke up and cried because Śiva was not there, both Neto and Dhāmāi gave their identities and told her of the duties assigned to them by Śiva.

Manasā, in consultation with Neto and Dhāmāi, planned to stay permanently on Sijuyā Hill and commanded Visvakarmā to build a palace there. In time a new kingdom grew up, where the people of thirty-six castes from the Brahmans at the top to the fishermen at the bottom, migrated from other kingdoms. It was a happy domain of Manasā.

### III.

Once when Manasā, accompanied by her friends, was sporting by the waters of a river, there came a Gandharva princess named Vinālatā. When Brahmā saw her,

his semen was discharged and out of it were born seven hundred ṛishis and two seven-headed monsters, the upper part of whom was human and the lower part beast. Again when the water from the Kamandalu (a water pot with a spout used by ascetics) was sprinkled on the place where the semen was discharged, a couple of ferocious tigers were born. Brahmā told them that they would be defeated by the son of Kapilā, the divine cow. They went to live in the domain of Manasā.

Brahmā's semen was once more discharged at the sight of Chāṇḍī's little finger while she was lying in bed with all the rest of her body covered. The semen was magically entered into the body of Chāṇḍī but she cast the embryo it produced on the water of the river Ballukā. There Kapilā came and drank water from the river. This caused her to become pregnant and the calf Manorath was born to her. After that, badly advised by an ill-willed cow, she entered a Brahman's garden and ate his vegetables. She was caught by the Brahman but was released when he came to know who she was. Then she hurried home, as she had left her new-born child Manorath, who by this time was hungry. On the way she met a pair of hungry tigers and their cubs. The tigers wanted to eat her but she was allowed to go with a promise that she would return to them after feeding her

child. Meantime, fatigued by thirst, Manorath had drunk up all the waters of the river Ballukā. His mother returned and told him the promise she had given to the tiger. This aroused great anger in him and he swore that he would not eat until he had killed the tiger. Both Kapilā and Manorath went out to meet the tiger. Manorath and the tiger fought and the latter was defeated.

The Lord Prajāpati accompanied by sages came to bathe in Ballukā but to their astonishment they found the river dried up. Prajāpati reported this to Śiva who discovered its cause by his supernatural power. He sent Nārada to Kapilā who came to Śiva with her child. Śiva appealed to Kapilā, who filled up the lake with her own milk, and the gods began to bathe.

#### IV.

Once the sage Durvāsā visited Kailāsa where he saw the gods dwelling and the sages Bhṛigu and Parāśara meditating. He also met a group of Vidyādharīs<sup>1</sup> and collected a garland of flowers from one of them. This garland was presented to Indra, who hung it on the neck of his elephant. Accidentally it fell to the ground from the

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1. Heavenly female musicians or demigoddesses.

elephant's neck. This aroused great anger in Durvāsā, who uttered a curse that Indra and Kamalā (Lakshmī) would be separated from that day. Indra requested the sage Durvāsā to withdraw his curse but he refused. Then Lakshmī asked shelter of the tree god, the mountain and the sea one after another. Only the sea promised her shelter and Lakshmī went under the sea taking with her the things at her command, such as rice and other crops, the moon, amṛita, Airāvata (Indra's elephant), Uchchaśravā (Indra's horse) and Parijāta (a plant bearing divine flowers). The absence of all these things brought a great calamity upon Indra and the other gods, who assembled together to make a plan to bring back Lakshmī and the things at her command. It was resolved that the sea of curd (kṣhīra nadī) should be churned for this purpose and that Mandāra Hill and Vāsuki should be appointed as the churning stick and the rope respectively. The tail of Vāsuki would be pulled by Hanumān and the head by the demons.<sup>1</sup>

The churning was started and the things were taken out one by one - Uchchaśravā, the moon, the rice and other crops, Airāvata and the nymphs (apsarās), Lakshmī, the Parijāta, and finally Dhanvantari holding a cup containing

1. Cf. supra, p.

amrita (ambrosia). In exchange for the amrita Dhanvantari had been given a scarf of victory (jaya-neta) and a magic pouch, (siddhi-jhuli) by Brahmā, with the boon that he would live in the memory of the people as an unrivalled poison doctor. This great knowledge also made him immortal and unconquerable. He asked also for the secret of his life and death, and he was told by Brahmā: "Your death will come if the scarf of victory and the magic pouch are stolen by Vishaharī, if the snake Udayakāl bites your chest and if Vishaharī throws mahābhāra."<sup>1</sup> Brahmā also suggested two remedies - the herb śāli-lisāli of the Gandhamādan hill and sea-foam of the River of Curd. The application of either of these on the snake-bite would restore Dhanvantari's life. Satisfied with Brahmā's instructions he left the place after paying his regards, and began to roam the world as an unrivalled ojhā.<sup>2</sup>

Next Vishnu in the guise of a ravishing woman distributed amrita among the gods, but the demons were cheated out of their share. Śiva did not like this so he refused to accept his share until the distribution was made to all those who had taken part in the churning of

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1. Possibly some kind of a spell, weighing down to the body so that the victim cannot move.
  2. Professional magicians, who are believed to cure snake-bites and to cast out evil spirits by charms and incantations.



of the ocean. He suggested a second churning. Brahmā protested, saying that only poison would be produced from it, but his warning was ignored. Śiva's proposal was gladly accepted by the demons, who had been deprived of the amrita, and finally a second churning was performed. Now only poison came out of the sea and threatened to consume the universe. The demons, and the gods left the place and only Hanumān and Śiva's bull stayed there with Śiva. On the advice of Hanumān Śiva drank the poison to save the universe and fell senseless. The news spread and the gods were afraid at the sight. They sent a message to Chāṇḍī by Nārada. Chāṇḍī came to the spot with her two children, Gaṇeśa and Karttikeya. She lamented and prepared to die on the funeral pyre of her husband which was then being erected. But suddenly she remembered the signet with five jewels given by Manasā, and told the other gods that Manasā had asked her to call her whenever anything serious happened to Śiva.

#### V.

Immediately Nārada was sent to Manasā, who refused to come with him as she had no clothes fit for the outer world. She agreed to go if her stepmother came personally with a garment and asked her help. Chāṇḍī did what Manasā wanted. Taking with her a coarse cloth

she went to call Manasā, but she found her in a queen's dress and felt humiliated. Manasā, accompanied by Chaṇḍī, reached the place where Śiva was lying dead. Manasā told the gods of the behaviour of her stepmother and showed them the piece of cloth which Chaṇḍī had offered her. They all tried to pacify her and promised to satisfy her after her father's recovery. But Chaṇḍī, very humiliated, approached to kick her. At this Manasā looked at her through her poison eye and Chaṇḍī fell senseless.

Manasā gave her full attention to curing her father. Thanks to her great power the poison began to come out of Śiva's mouth and he recovered. As soon as he saw his beloved wife Chaṇḍī lying on the ground he began to lament. Manasā brought back the life of Chaṇḍī by a glance from her other eye. She then distributed half the poison among the snakes, scorpions and biting insects and the other half was kept by herself in one of her eyes.

Then Śiva thought of the marriage of Manasā, and he came to know through meditation that the sage Jaratkāra<sup>1</sup> would become her husband. With this in mind Śiva met Jaratkāra on the bank of Ballukā and proposed

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1. Jaratkāru of the Mahābhārata.

his marriage with Manasā. Jaratkāra refused, as it would disturb his meditations. But at the same time he heard a message from ~~the~~ ancestral spirits that they would be free if he continued the family line and so he consented to the marriage.

Siva returned happily and all the necessary arrangements for the marriage ceremony were made. Siva arranged the marriage not only of Manasā and Jaratkāra, but also of Neto and the sage Vaśishṭha. After the ceremonies Chaṇḍī did not like Manasā being praised by the gods nor did she like to see her happy in her married life. Manasā was advised by her stepmother Chaṇḍī to wear snake-ornaments on the bridal night. Jaratkāra passed a sleepless night for fear of the snakes, whereas Manasā slept well. Chaṇḍī threw a frog into the room of the newly married couple, and all the snakes hissed together and ran towards the frog. The terrified Jaratkāra ran out of the house and took shelter in a conch in the sea. Manasā did not find her husband in the room in the morning. By her supernatural power she discovered what had happened to him, and bewailed her ill-fortune.

Siva was informed of the absence of Jaratkāra and went out in search of him. He found him and took him back to Manasā. For a few days he lived with her and

then he left her, with the boon that a son would be born to her. Neto, too, was blessed with a similar boon by her husband, who left her at the same time. Both Manasā and her attendant Neto became pregnant and each of them gave birth to a child. The child of the former was named Āstika and was sent to Vāsuki for education. After completing his studies he was returned to Manasā on Sijuyā Hill.

## VI.

King Parīkshit was cursed by a sage for defiling his body with a dead snake while he was meditating. The curse was that Parīkshit would die of snake-bite after six days. Parīkshit was very distressed and told his ministers and attendants about the curse. They suggested his taking help from the ojhā Dhanvantari. They told him how Dhanvantari had defeated the great ojhā Śaṅka who resided in the Dhaval mountain, and earned the name Śaṅka-Dhanvantari. Dhanvantari was invited by Parīkshit to guard him from snake bite. On the way Dhanvantari met the snake Takshaka who had been instructed by the sage to bite the King Parīkshit. A contest followed, leading to the defeat of Takshaka. Finding no other alternative Takshaka bribed Dhanvantari not to help the King. The King was then bitten by the snake and died, receiving no

help from Dhanvantari.

Parīkshit was succeeded by his son Janamijaya. One day while hunting in a forest he saw a Brahman engaged in killing snakes. The King enquired the cause of his action and the Brahman told him that his son and wife had died of snake-bite, so he had made an oath to kill snakes. This reminded the king of his father's death and he told the story of it to the Brahman. The Brahman suggested a snake-sacrifice (sarpasattra vajña) that would wipe out the race of snakes from the earth. In this sacrifice he would perform the priestly function. The king agreed and arrangements were made for the snake-sacrifice. As soon as it started, the chiefs of the snake race sought shelter in hidden places. The news was reported by Kālī to Manasā, who asked help from Neto. By this time many snakes had been killed. As advised by Neto Manasā sent her only child Astika who persuaded Janamejaya to stop the sacrifice. Thus the remaining snakes were saved.

## VII.

Manasā was desirous of receiving homage from human beings. She therefore came down to earth in her chariot accompanied by her advisor Neto and began to appear to human beings in order to initiate and propagate

her cult.

She first appeared to some cowherds who laughed at her and called her a "blood thirsty witch." She came to them as an old grey-headed Brahman woman carrying a basket, and begged milk off them to break her ceremonial fast, with a promise to help them. But they threw dust at her and a few of them beat her. Then she told them that she was a daughter of Śiva and was known as Manasā, the snake goddess. They did not believe her and challenged her to prove her identity which she did by summoning the snakes before them. The terrified boys prepared to beat the snakes with their sticks, but Manasā disappeared and the snakes also.

Later on, when the cowherds were going to drink water, all their cows fell into a marsh. They realized that such mischief had been caused by Manasā, who stood nearby and laughed at them. Then they fell at her feet, saying that they would worship her from then onwards. Manasā responded by rescuing their cows. Once again she demonstrated her power by milking a barren cow into her wicker basket; she then held it upside down and without spilling the milk drank from it. Having conquered the hearts of the cowherds, Manasā sat under a tree where, accompanied by Neto, she taught the boys the way in which



her worship was to be conducted.

"My worship is to be performed on the tenth tithi of the bright half of Jyāishṭha with various offerings. There should be an abundance of naivedya (offerings) (consisting of) plenty of sweets and ten different good fruits i.e., plantain, karkatī, coconut, phuti (a part of cucumber), betel-nut, date, jack-fruit, mango, jām (a sort of black berry), and fan-palm fruit. There should be betel nut and betel leaf, scented flowers in abundance, incense, lighted lamps and sandal (paste or wood). Various musical instruments are to be played with great joy. After ablution bring a golden pot containing water with a twig of si over the mouth of it, and worship me, (who ~~am~~ mystically) within it. Listen to me attentively; I will appear there in the pot and fulfil the desires (of the devotee), blessing him with wealth, children and fame."

The goddess then left the place riding in her chariot towards Sijuyā Hill. The specified date came and the cowherds arranged the ceremony as they had been told. Manasā was satisfied with their homage, and blessed them

with all round prosperity and with the special boon of immunity from snake-bite.

#### VIII.

By the side of a tank under a tree by the wayside the cowherds continued to worship Manasā from time to time. While they were worshipping one day a Muslim farmer went to bathe in the tank. The cowherds angrily drove him away, as he was a Muslim. He reported it to their chief farmer Gorā Minā who at once set out with his men to punish the cowherds. As they came, the cowherds fled, leaving the pot of Manasā behind. Gorā Minā stood on the mud throne of the goddess in order to dishonour her. This so enraged Manasā that she at once took revenge by sending her smallest snake, Bighatiyā, in the guise of a kind of moth, who killed all the Muslims except one, whom the snake left alive so that he could report the news to the Muslim chief Hāsan and his brother Husen. About the same time Hāsan's seven maidservants went to fetch water from the nearest pond, where they saw an old woman worshipping the pot of Manasā. The woman was Manasā herself. They angrily abused the old woman for performing such worship during the Muslim's month of fasting, but when they approached to attack her



Manasā disappeared. Then they found the snake Bighatiyā in the guise of a kind of moth as before. When one of them picked it up, it bit her. Next it bit five of the other six girls. The one survivor returned to the court of Hāsan, whom she told of the mischief caused by Manasā.

The enraged Hāsan ordered his soldiers to march against Manasā and arrest her. This was not approved of by Hāsan's wife, who requested him to countermand his order saying that it would be impossible for a man to fight against the goddess Manasā who had all the snakes at her command; but Hāsan ignored her request. War started and ultimately Hāsan was defeated and all his people except his wife were killed by the snake-soldiers of Manasā. This greatly shocked Hāsan and having no alternative, he submitted to Manasā. When he was asked by Manasā to make arrangements for her worship he complied. She therefore promised to restore the lost lives and property, when he worshipped the goddess, symbolized by a gold pot containing a twig of sij. The goddess kept her promise. Her power so impressed him that he became her strict devotee. He built a temple and installed a gold pot there permanently. Then he took direct steps to spread her cult. He consulted

with five Brahmans in order to learn the Śāstric method of worshipping her and sent missions to different places to propagate the cult, and he himself worshipped the goddess with great pomp and grandeur in ceremonies at which Brahman priests officiated. Hāsan was blessed with children, wealth, fame and power.

### IX.

One day Manasā again came down to earth and saw two fishermen brothers, Jālu and Mālu, who were busy fishing in a river. She appeared on the bank in the guise of an old Brahman woman and asked their help in crossing the river. They refused, thinking that to comply would delay the supply of fish to their patron, the great merchant prince Chāndo of Champakanagar. She repeated her request and they became very annoyed and abused her as "a witch". She therefore cast a spell on them and they did not catch a single fish for hours together. They realised that their failure to help the old Brahman woman was the cause. So they took her to the other bank with great care.

Now, by the grace of Manasā, they caught fish in plenty. Under her order they cast their net again

and in their last catch they found a couple of gold pots. When they asked about the pots Manasā told them who she was and asked them to worship the pots in their home. They took them to their mother who, assisted by her daughters-in-law, began to worship with special devotion. At last all the members of the family took to worshipping the pots and they soon became prosperous. The house of Jālu and Mālu became full of gold as a result of the blessings of Manasā. In this case the worship of the gold pots was followed by the beating of cymbals and drums.

### X.

One day while Sanakā, the wife of Chāndo, accompanied by her six daughters-in-law and numerous attendants, was going to bathe on the river Gungarī (Gāngurī) on the occasion of the Mauni Amābasyā Vrata, she heard the beating of cymbals and drums coming out of the house of Jālu and Mālu. Sanakā sent one of her attendants to enquire. She returned and told her mistress that the family of Jālu and Mālu, which had become wealthy by the blessings of Manasā, was worshipping the goddess. Then Sanakā herself went to the house and made full enquiry regarding the sacred pots and the way of worship. Nichhani,

the mother of Jālu and Mālu, explained the form of the ceremonies, which was similar to that performed by the cowherds. She added that the goddess should be worshipped daily in addition to the special ceremony on the Daśaharā. Sanakā was so impressed by the power of the goddess that she wanted to take the pots away with her. At this Nichhani was distressed but hesitated to object. The difficulty was solved by the intervention of the goddess herself who instructed Nichhani to allow Sanakā to take the pots. Sanakā then returned home, accompanied by her six daughters-in-law, began to worship the pots. Chāndo, her husband did not consider Manasā to be a goddess, so, when he saw his wife worshipping the pots, he smashed them to pieces. He was an ardent <sup>devotee</sup> of Śiva and had obtained the favour of Śiva for his extreme austerities. Śiva had given him the mahājñān (supernatural wisdom) which made him not only immortal but also unconquerable. Chāndo had been instructed by Chāṇḍī not to worship Manasā in any way, as she had a bad name among the gods and goddesses for her wicked nature.

Nichhani heard the news of Chāndo's behaviour, came to the house of Chāndo and took away the broken pots with deep devotion. Chāndo's attitude enraged Manasā who attempted to take revenge by destroying her beautiful

garden with the help of her snakes. But Chāndo, the possessor of the mahājñāna, was quickly able to revive the destroyed garden. Manasā lamented her defeat.

Neto told Manasā that she would not be able to defeat Chāndo unless his mahājñāna was stolen. As advised by Neto, Manasā dressed herself as a devastating beauty, and appeared in the guise of the youngest sister of Sanakā and stood alone, crying near the house of Chāndo. Noticing her crying Sanakā came out of the house and asked the cause of her lamentation. Manasā told her that she had been left by her husband and did not know what to do. Sanakā asked her to tell the whole story and when she did so Sanakā recognised the girl as her youngest sister. Manasā was cordially accompanied by Sanakā into her home. While they were talking, Chāndo returned and saw Manasā, who infatuated him. Manasā also pretended love for Chandō. At night Chāndo and Manasā talked and made love, sitting side by side; this aroused Chāndo's passion, but Manasā refused to fulfil his desires unless he told her his secrets. Chāndo told her and she at once disappeared, thus depriving him of his mahājñāna. Then Manasā destroyed his garden and he was powerless to prevent her.

Now Chāndo fully realised that he had been thoroughly

deceived. Adorning herself with nāga ornaments Manasā paid a visit to Chāndo in a dream and threatened to take revenge for the enmity which he had shown by smashing her pot. Chāndo told his dream to his councillors and asked their help and advice. Finally it was decided that Chāndo should take help from Saṅkha Dhanvantari.

## XI.

Dhanvantari was invited by Chāndo to his palace and was told of the conflict with Manasā. To test the power of Dhanvantari, Chāndo requested him to revive his ruined garden. Dhanvantari took up the challenge and restored the garden by his own mahājñān. Chāndo was very glad to find his beautiful garden restored and to think of the defeat of Manasā, and he rewarded Dhanvantari. Manasā was very angry with Dhanvantari for helping Chāndo. Being humiliated she made a new plan to disarm Chāndo by discovering the secret of Dhanvantari's life, so that he would not be able to help Chāndo.

Manasā appeared before the disciples of Dhanvantari as a flower girl selling poisonous garlands. They robbed her of the garlands, as she demanded an exorbitant price for them. She complained to their master about the

undisciplined conduct of his disciples and Dhanvantari promised to pay after proper enquiry. He came to the spot and found his disciples lying dead near a tank, but the flower girl had disappeared. He at once realized that she was none other than Manasā. By his mahājñān he brought the disciples back to life and reported the news to Chāndo.

Again defeated Manasā took another course. She appeared at the house of Dhanvantari in the guise of a milk-maid selling curd and sour milk. Kamalā, the wife of Dhanvantari, was charmed by her looks and asked her name. Manasā said her name was Kamalā. Then the wife of Dhanvantari took her into her home as her friend, as both of them shared the same name. There they talked very intimately. Manasā created a rain-storm so that she could stop there for the night. She asked Kamalā whether she knew the secret of the success of her husband, and told her that, as her husband was a great ojhā, she should know the secret of the preservation of the life of her husband as he might be in danger at any time. She acted so naturally that Kamalā was deceived and that night she asked her husband what his secret was. Manasā concealed herself in the room as Dhanvantari told his wife the secret.

When she had found out the secret of Dhanvantari's



life, Manasā went back to her kingdom and returned with the snake Udayakāl, who under her instructions bit Dhanvantari on the chest when he and his wife were asleep, and deprived him of the scarf of victory and of the magic pouch. Dhanvantari was wakened from sleep by the pain of the snake bite and told Kamalā, who went to call Dhanā and Manā, two of his chief disciples. They came and then departed to bring the herb sāli-~~bi~~śāli from the Gandhamādan hill. While coming back with the herb Manasā appeared before them as an old Brahman woman and wept. They asked her why she was crying. Manasā replied that she was crying because of the sudden death of the ojhā Dhanvantari who had supported her. Her acting was so convincing that Dhanā and Manā threw down the herb and began to run to their master's house. They believed that there would be no further use for the herb. On arriving they found their master still living. They told him everything and all realized that it was Manasā who had played this trick on them. They were then sent out for sea-foam. While returning with it, Manasā appeared before them as a Brahman. She magically made a fire appear in the distance, with smoke arising from the flames, and pointed it out to Dhanā and Manā, saying that



their master was being burnt to death. But they remembered Manasā's previous deceit and they took no action. Manasā then asked to see the medicine and they handed it over to her. She at once disappeared with it. Dhanā and Manā came back and again found their master still living. They told everything to their master. Thus they were twice deceived by Manasā and Dhanvantari died without treatment. Before his death he instructed Dhanā and Manā not to burn his dead body but to cut it into eight pieces to be buried in the earth in the different quarters of the domain of Chāndo, so that no snake would be able to enter the land.

The instruction of Dhanvantari worried Manasā and led her to formulate a new plan. She dressed herself as a Brahman and appeared before the disciples of Dhanvantari, who were about to cut up his corpse. There Manasā advised them against the cutting up of the corpse into pieces and persuaded them to stop. She instructed them to cut a bit from the little finger of the corpse to be buried in the earth to the north of Chāndo's domain, and to let the corpse float on a raft of banana stumps in the hope of its being brought back to life, if it reached any ojhā. They did what Manasā instructed. Then the body of Dhanvantari was carried by the snake

Udayakāl to Sijuyā hill where Manasā revived him and turned him into a ram.

Next Manasā came to the city of Champak in the guise of a milkmaid and destroyed the sandal tree under which Chāndo worshipped Śiva. This shocked Chāndo very much and he asked his councillors and advisors what he should do. With the agreement of all it was announced that the man who could restore the sandal tree would be well rewarded. Dhanā and Manā, the sons of the flower woman Kājalā and the favourite disciples of Dhanvantari, came forward and brought the sandal tree back to life. Manasā realized that Dhanā and Manā were great hindrances to her success. Therefore, by the order of Manasā, the small poisonous snake Bighatiyā bit Dhanā and Manā while they were returning home from Chāndo's palace with pride and honour. In the meantime Manasā made friends with Kājalā, to whom she told the news of her sons' death by snake bite. Kājalā lamented the loss of her sons, but Manasā promised her to bring them back to life, on the condition that Kājalā would let her take them away with her. Kājalā agreed and Manasā gave life to the dead bodies, reminding her of the promise. Kājalā requested her to leave one of them with her, but Manasā disappeared with Dhanā and Manā in her chariot and made them her attendants. Now Chāndo was

left completely without help.

## XI.

On Neto's advice Manasā planned to kill the six sons of Chāndo, who continued to abuse her. She first sent the snake Dhorā, who returned without making any attempt to bite the young men and told Manasā that he had failed. This enraged Manasā, who took away his poison and thus made this species of snakes non-poisonous.<sup>1</sup> Then the snake Kālī was sent, but she felt pity for Chāndo's sons and could not bite them. As she had been entrusted with the task of killing them by her mistress, she had to find another way of fulfilling her mission. She therefore poisoned the boiled rice which they ate in the morning, so that they all quickly died. Chāndo realized that it was Manasā who had taken away his sons and he felt humiliated at his defeat by Manasā. He did not allow the six corpses to be burnt, but ordered that they should be placed on rafts of banana stumps, which were set adrift in the river.

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1. This story is still widely believed by Bengali villagers.

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Gūṅgarī. Then the snake Kālī carried all the dead bodies to the Sijuyā hill where they were kept under the care of Manasā.

## XII.

Manasā dressed herself as Siva and appeared before Chāndo in a dream. She advised him to sail for trade to Anupam Pātan<sup>2</sup> where Siva would again teach him the mahājñān by which he would be able to restore the lost lives of his sons. Next day Chāndo told his councillors and wife about his dream. In the meantime Manasā visited Indra to solicit the aid of his dancers Anirudha and Ushā. She told Indra her plan, namely that Anirudha and Ushā should be born into the mortal world respectively as the youngest son and daughter-in-law of Chāndo, bearing the names Lakhindar and Behulā. Chāndo would be sent to Anupam Pātan for trade and brought back home after a long period of financial and physical suffering. After his

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1. It is popularly believed that it was the custom in India that the corpse of one dying by snake bite was not cremated but placed on a raft of banana stumps and let float on the river, in the hope of its being brought back to life if it reached any ojhā. Nowadays this custom is very rarely practised among the lower classes (cf. G.W. Briggs, The Chamars, p.179; Indian Folklore, Vol.1, No.2, 1956, p.22). The reference to this practice is found in the version of Bijay Gupta (p.100). Chāndo also followed the long-standing practice, prevalent in India.
  2. From the description of the route taken it appears that this is a port in South or Southeast of India and not the well known Pātan in Gujarat.

return he would settle his son's marriage with Behulā, and Lakhindar would be bitten by a snake. Behulā would undergo a river journey with the corpse of her husband and would reach the kingdom of the Immortals, where her husband would be brought back to life along with his brothers, and the crew, which was to be drowned by the spell of Manasā at the time of Chāndo's return voyage. Then all of them would return, and this would make Chāndo believe in the goddess Manasā whom he had ignored.

Indra disapproved of the plan, but Manasā was determined to have Anirudha and Ushā for her purpose. In honour of Manasā's presence in the court of Indra, a dance was arranged and Anirudha was asked to perform. Manasā caused Anirudha to make a mistake in his dance. This made Indra angry and he cursed him to become a mortal. This was a great blow to Anirudha as well as to his beloved and faithful wife Ushā, who cried and bowed down at the feet of Manasā, who took hold of her husband. Kāma, the father of Anirudha, also prayed to Manasā to release his son. But all the requests were sternly refused. Ultimately Ushā appealed to Indra but to no effect. At last Anirudha and Ushā gave up their life in heaven and their souls were carried away by Manasā, who inserted them into the wombs of Sanakā and Sumitrā respectively.

## XIII.

Now Chāndo decided to set sail and ordered his captain Durlabha to prepare the boats for a trading voyage. Sanakā tried to dissuade him but failed. Chāndo was told by Sanakā that she was five months pregnant and Chāndo told her to name the child Lakhindar, if male, and Jayamālā, if female. The auspicious ceremonies were performed at the departure of Chāndo, who was earnestly requested by Sanakā not to dishonour Manasā. Sanakā also urged the crew and the attendants to worship Manasā. Saying good-bye to Sanakā, Chāndo started his journey, and the seven boats (Mādhukarā, Sarvajayā, Jagaddal, Sumāṅgalā, Navaratna, Chitrālekḥā and Śaśimukhi) set sail one by one from Rāmeśvarā Ghāṭā. All the boats were loaded with goods for export.

Sailing down the river Rāmeśvarā, Chāndo passed or touched Dharma-Khāna, the Ajaya river, Ujabani (i.e. Ujāni), the river Siṁhā, Indra Ghāṭā, Nadiā, Hātikāṇḍā, Guptipārā, Singārpur, Triveni, Saptagrām, Kumārhaṭṭa, Haughly, Bhātpārā, Boro, Kāṅkinārā, Muḷājara, Garuliya, Pāikpārā, Bhadreśvarā, Chāpdāni, Ichhāpur, Bāṅkibāzār, Kharḍaha, Risrā, Sukchar, Konnaḡār, Kotraṃ, Kāmārhatī, Anriyādaha, Ghusuṛi, Chitpur, Kalikātā, Betara, Kālighāṭā, Churāghāte, Dhanasthān and Bāruipur. On the way Chāndo

worshipped Indra, Śiva, Sarvamaṅgalā, Chāṇḍī and Kālī at Indraghāṭa, Saptagrām, Chitpur, Betara and Kālighaṭa respectively.

In due course Chāṇḍo reached Kālīdaha where Manasā had ordered the architect Viśvakarmā to build a temple for her worship. The temple was filled with precious things and guarded by an army of snakes so that Chāṇḍo would be filled with awe and wonder and would worship her. Chāṇḍo marked the banner on the crest of the temple from a distance. The captain told his master that the place belonged to the goddess Manasā and requested him to pay homage to the goddess. Ignoring this request Chāṇḍo took his stick of hintal and shouted to the snakes, who were terrified and ran away. Next he came down from the boats, entered the temple, broke the pots of Manasā with his stick, and ordered the crew to plunder the treasures of the temple. He boasted of his power before the captain and the crew. Then he again resumed his journey, passed or touched Huliya<sup>1</sup>, Chhatrabhaga, Vadrikā-Kuṇḍa, Hathiyaṅga, Hadiya-Daha, Jokā-Daha, Sarpa-Daha, Kariya-Daha, Saṅkha Daha, Manasā-Daha and Siṃha Dha, and ultimately reached Anupama Pātana.

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1. 'Daha' stands here for a deep pool in a river.

Chāndo's arrival was told to the King who invited him for a business talk. He came to the court with rich presents and introduced himself. He then gave a brief account of his journey, stating that on the way he had passed by Simhala (Ceylon). They agreed to discuss business on the next day and Chāndo left the court. Next day the King came to the port where an exchange of goods took place between Chāndo and the King, on the basis of barter. On the whole Chāndo gained from this transaction. He was so satisfied that he totally forgot the promise of Manasā in the guise of Siva, to give him back his mahājñān. He stayed there very happily for many years, as he was under the spell of Manasā.

#### XIV.

In the meantime Sanakā gave birth to a male child, who was named Lakhindar. The child grew and was sent to school, where he studied literature, grammar, drama, vocabulary, sūtras, astrology, the Purāṇas and other subjects. After the completion of his education he was formally entrusted with the charge of the state in the absence of his father. At last Chāndo dreamt that his wife was in great danger and longed every moment for his



presence. This dream was magically produced by Manasā, as part of her plan. At about the same time, a female child was born to Sumitrā and the merchant Sāhe in the city of Ujāni. She was very beautiful and was named Behulā. Thus the souls of Aniruddha and Ushā, which had been inserted into the wombs of Sanakā and Sumitra, were reincarnated as Lakhindar and Behulā.

#### XV.

The day after his dream Chāndo started for home and safely reached Kālidaha, where a cyclonic storm was created by Manasā and all the boats and the crew sank. The lost lives and property were kept under the supervision of Varuṇa. By the order of Manasā, Hanumān sank the boats one by one. Chāndo alone remained alive, carried along on the river. As he floated he saw a pillow but he did not touch it because the name of Manasā was written on it. After some time he came to a raft, which also bore the name of Manasā. He kicked away both the pillow and the raft sent by Manasā herself. Finally he reached the shore, where he found himself alone.

Manasā appeared before Chāndo as a married woman with a pitcher in her arms and asked him the cause of his distress. Chāndo told her the story of his sufferings

and abused Manasā who was the source of all his trouble. On the instructions of the woman he put on a filthy cloth, taken from the cremation ground. Then he entered a forest and collected sticks of wood, which were in fact snakes in disguise. He made a bundle of the sticks and tried to place it on his head but could not do so till, by the order of Manasā, Dhāmāi came to assist him in the guise of a man. Then he walked to a village in order to sell his wood, and came to the house of a potter to whom he offered the wood for four cowries. As he felt very weary, he tried to lay down the load, but unfortunately it fell on some clay pots which were broken. At this the potter lost his temper and beat Chāndo till he fell on the ground senseless. After a while he recovered and was paid four cowries for the wood by the potter's wife. Chāndo then proceeded to the settlement of weavers to buy a garment with the cowries. But the weavers jeered at him for thinking that he could buy a cloth for so small an amount. In the meanwhile the snakes took their original shapes at the command of Manasā. This infuriated the potter and his son, who ran out to catch Chāndo. They beat him for defrauding them and took back the four cowries. Fatigued by hunger, thirst and pain Chāndo came to a river-side and wept. He was so depressed that he prayed for death.

Manasā again appeared in the guise of a married woman and enquired of Chāndo what had happened. He told his story and asked where he could get some food. She advised him to eat banana skins lying nearby but Chāndo hesitated. Finally he collected some of them and went to bathe in the river before eating. He decided to worship Siva with the banana skins before he ate. Manasā realized this, so she sent a cow to eat them. Realizing that he had again been tricked by Manasā Chāndo walked back to the village, where he suffered indignities at the hands of fowlers, robbers, some people who came to cremate a Brahman boy, and villagers who thought his presence was inauspicious.

Once more Manasā appeared as a Brahman and advised Chāndo to take shelter with a neighbouring Brahman family, where he was offered the task of tending cattle for three meals a day and a piece of cloth a year. After three days he was discharged for inefficiency and began to walk the roads in great trouble. Finally he reached the domain of his friend Chandraketu, to whom he told his misfortunes, and who entertained him very heartily. At dinner, Chāndo saw a sacred pot of Manasā. He immediately left the room and wanted to start for home, but he stayed the night at his friends request.

Early in the morning Chāndo set out for home with a few attendants, offered by his friend. But, directed by Kubuddhi \* (Bad Thought), he decided that he did not require an attendant and asked them to go back. He also gave up the kingly dress provided by his friend, and returned homewards dressed in a filthy rag. He reached Champakanagar at dusk and the cowherds took him for a goblin and reported the news to Lakhindar, who issued a proclamation urging his subjects to beware of the goblin. Chāndo began to lament his fate and came in the evening to the house of Kājalā. There he told of his suffering, but Kājalā took him for the goblin. Then Chāndo left the house and finally hid himself in his own banana grove. At that time the maidservant Jhāuyā came to take some banana leaves and seeing Chāndo thought he was the goblin. Sanakā was immediately told by the maid of the presence of the goblin in the grove. The people encircled Chāndo to kill him, but ultimately he was recognized by Sanakā.

#### XVI.

Chāndo told his story fully. He was very cheerful at seeing his son Lakhindar and forgot his past misfortunes

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\* It appears in this and other texts of the period as a personified spirit of evil.

AsdLakhindar grew up, Chāndo tried to find a suitable match for him. But a rumour circulated in the country that Lakhindar would die on the wedding night, so those who had daughters left the country. Manasā had arranged for Behulā to be the bride of Lakhindar, as has been already noted. She appeared to Sanakā as an old woman and claimed to be her aunt. When she was asked the cause of her arrival, she told Sanakā that there was a beautiful girl named Behulā, the daughter of the merchant Sāhe, at Ujāni, who would be a very good match for Lakhindar. Having given this information Manasā left the house. Sanakā told it to her husband Chāndo who soon visited the house of Sāhe with his friends and advisors. They came to Golātnagar, where they rested on the bank of the river Mukutāsar. Behulā, accompanied by her attendants, came to bathe in the river. Manasā cursed Behulā as her frolics in the water scattered a few drops on her body as she sat by the side of the tank in the guise of an old Brahman woman. The curse was that her husband would die of snake bite on the wedding night. But Behulā ignored the curse of the old woman as she was sure to get help from Manasā. They quarrelled and finally went to Gaṅgā for judgement. Gaṅgā pleased by Behulā's argument, supported her and rebuked Manasā. She showed her favour by

giving her conch-shell bangles and vermilion as a safeguard for her future husband's life. Chāndo who had been a witness of the meeting between Gaṅgā and Behulā was very pleased with Behulā's courage and behaviour generally.

He told his family priest Somāi to follow Behulā and to ask the merchant Sāhe whether he could allow his daughter to be married by Lakhindar. Chāndo waited on the bank of Mukṭāsar. Somāi met Sāhe and spoke to him as directed by Chāndo. Sāhe sent his six sons to receive Chāndo from Mukṭāsar. Chāndo and his friends were cordially received by Sāhe, who agreed to the proposal of marriage between Lakhindar and his daughter Behulā. But Sumitrā, the wife of Sāhe did not agree to the proposal. When Behulā heard of Chāndo's purpose, she expressed her desire to marry his son. The date of the marriage was settled. When Chāndo was asked to take food in the house of Sāhe, he told him that he took boiled pieces of iron as his regular food as medicine, for an affliction caused by salt water. Sāhe gave the order to a smith, who brought the pills of iron. His wife tried her best to boil them but could not do so. At last Behulā cooked the iron pills by the grace of Manasā. Chāndo was very pleased and ate the pills. He

left the house next morning, reached his own domain, and told Sanakā what had happened.

As it was predicted that Lakhindar would die on the bridal night, Chāndo built a sealed chamber on Sātālī hill. But before its completion Manasā paid a visit to the architect and asked him to leave a hair's breadth wide hole so that a small snake might pass through it. The architect at first hesitated, but agreed when Manasā threatened him.

The wedding day arrived and friends and relatives came with handsome presents to Chāndo's house. All sorts of preliminary marriage rites were performed in the houses of both the bride and the groom. Then the marriage procession started out for the house of Sāhe and on the way it succered much from a storm created by Manasā. Finally the procession reached Ujāni. Before the ceremony was performed, Behulā worshipped Manasā, who appeared and talked with her devotee. Behulā invited her to witness her marriage. Manasā came and stood in the air on her chariot attended by snakes. Lakhindar suddenly saw the snakes and fell down senseless. This occurrence created great lamentation. Chāndo's heart was quite broken, but Behulā did not lose heart. She went out to worship Manasā in a sacred place under a

tree. Manasā appeared and gave her a golden pot containing water, saying that if some of the water was sprinkled on her husband's body he would recover. Behulā returned and did accordingly. Lakhindar recovered and everybody was happy. When the marriage ceremony was over the newly married couple retired to bed in Sāhe's house where Manasā, after consulting with Neto, sent four snakes, one by one to bite Lakhindar. But Behulā caught all of them with pincers. She released them when she heard a message from Manasā telling her to do so. The night was passed safely.

## XVII.

In the morning the couple accompanied by their attendants came to the house of Chāndo. Sanakā welcomed them, performing all customary rites. They were directed to stay in the sealed chamber which was guarded by ojhās and other attendants. Behulā did not forget the curse of Manasā in the guise of an old Brahman woman on the prediction about her husband's future. So she asked him to be very cautious. At night Lakhindar asked Behulā to cook something as he was hungry. She told him that there were no facilities for cooking in the sealed



chamber but she could not ignore her husband's request. She made some temporary arrangements and cooked a meal. Lakhindar ate with satisfaction.

Now Lakhindar wanted to make love with Behulā, looked at her, and wanted to embrace her. Behulā was unwilling as this was not proper on the bridal night. Annoyed and disappointed Lakhindar fell asleep. Manasā meanwhile discussed her plans with Neto. The snake Kālī was summoned and told to bite Lakhindar. But the snake did not dare to go without sufficient preparation. So Kālī was given Sleep and Drowsiness as helpers. Manasā followed her and waited at a distance. Kālī entered the room through the minute hole left by the architect and found the couple asleep. This scene aroused her sympathy, and she hesitated to bite Lakhindar. But finally remembering the order of Manasā, she did bite him. Behulā woke up on hearing the shout of her husband who was in great pain. With her pincers Behulā cut off the tip of the tail of Kālī as she was escaping. Very soon Lakhindar died and Behulā cried loudly and was heard by the attendants outside the room. Then the news was spread. Chāndo and Sanakā came to the spot and lamented their ill-fortune. At last Chāndo tried to console his wife, saying that there was nothing

to fear from Manasā any more. Sanakā blamed Chāndo because through his neglect of Manasā, all his sons had suffered premature death from snake bite. Behulā expressed the same opinion.

Lakhindar's death shocked Behulā so much that she requested her father-in-law to allow her to go with the corpse of her husband on a raft of banana stumps to Manasā, from whom she would beg back her husband's life. Chāndo tried to dissuade Behulā arguing that it would be impossible to revive Lakhindar thus. He also assured her of every comfort with his family. But Behulā was determined. The corpse of Lakhindar was placed on a raft made by the order of Chāndo, and thus was set adrift on the river Gungari. Behulā sat behind the corpse.<sup>1</sup> Chāndo and Sanakā lamented and the crowd looked on with sympathy. The raft was swiftly carried on the current, leaving Champakanagar out of sight.

Manasā in the guise of a crow sat on the raft and tried to eat some flesh off the corpse. But Behulā told the crow of the tragic death of her husband which

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1. We do not agree with the view of Sukumar Sen who writes that "in the original version of the story directly based on folklore she [Behulā] must have been compelled to take that course" (Visvabharati Quarterly, vol. XXVI, Nos. 3 & 4, p. 218). Behulā was criticised by Sanakā for her bad fortune (Nārāyan Deb, p. 81; Ketakādās, pp. 258, 260), but when she proposed to float on the river with the corpse of her husband both Chāndo (Bipradās, p. 206) and Sanakā (Ketakādās, p. 261) tried to dissuade her.

roused its sympathy. The crow was requested by Behulā to send news of her to her parents at Ujāni. It first hesitated but finally agreed. Having received the news from the crow, who had been given a ring of Behulā to guarantee the genuineness of the news, Sumitrā sent her six sons to bring Behulā back to their home but Behulā told them of her firm determination not to live without her husband. The brothers went away with very sad hearts. Behulā ultimately met a wicked man named Dhanāpulā who stopped her raft. He was told by Behulā of her tragic story which impressed him so much that he allowed her to proceed.

Next she was stopped by an old, ugly and wicked man named Godā, who, when he heard her story, told her that he was a relative of Chāndo. He asked her to go with him to his house, but she refused. Godā at last allowed her to go on. Then she was attacked by a group of gamblers whom she pacified by giving them gold. Next she infatuated a crippled hunchback angling in the river, who stopped the raft and wanted to take her home. Behulā rebuked the man and resumed her journey. After this she was attacked by vultures and then by a tiger. In the latter case Behulā escaped through the intervention of Manasā. Next she passed down the river Chānak where she was attacked by Burāniyās, a group of robbers in the

guise of holy men. Here she was saved by Manasā, who struck the robbers blind. Then after six months' journey she came to Chaumukha, where she floated far from the shore and wept in fear.

At last she found a washerwoman who came on the shore with a child and a bag of dirty garments. Actually the washerwoman was Neto, who had been sent by Manasā to help Behulā. Before she started her work, she put her son to death. After she had finished her washing, she brought the child back to life. Behulā noticed this with astonishment. When Neto was about to leave the place, Behulā, realising her connection with the gods because of her supernatural power, requested her to guide her to the domain of Manasā. The story of her husband's death and of her former life was briefly told by Behulā to Neto whom she followed with the decomposed body of her husband. Ultimately she was advised by Neto to go to the court of Indra.

#### XVIII.

Behulā did what Neto told her. In the court of Indra she performed a dance which impressed and infatuated Śiva. She soon aroused the god's sympathy by the story

of her tragic life on earth and of her former life in heaven. Nārada was sent to bring Manasā, who denied the story as told by Behulā. But Behulā was finally vindicated when she produced evidence in the form of the tip of Kālī's tail which she had cut off on the iron chamber. Manasā explained that she had treated the family of Chāndo so cruelly because Chāndo had always abused her and did not consider her to be a goddess. Manasā asked Behulā to take an oath that her father-in-law would worship her if she brought Lakhindar back to life. Behulā agreed and went to fetch in the decomposed body of her husband. Before bringing it she washed the bones in the river, where a big sheat-fish swallowed a knee-cap. This was reported to Manasā who got it from the fish. After fitting the bones together, Manasā uttered spells and life returned to the body. Behulā was overjoyed to see her husband alive again. Once more, accompanied by Lakhindar who played on a drum, she delighted the gods with her dancing. As a result the six brothers of Lakhindar were brought back to life by Manasā in the same manner as Lakhindar. They all left the court of Indra and proceeded homewards.

#### XIX.

The seven brothers and Behulā, accompanied by Manasā

herself, came to Kālidaha on a raft (apparently magically propelled by Manasā). There Behulā requested Manasā to recover Chāndo's seven boats with their cargoes and crews. Manasā granted her prayer. Thus Behulā rescued the lost lives and property by her ardent devotion. On their way back Lakhindar punished, killed or rewarded the men and animals who had attacked or assisted Behulā during her journey. When the boats arrived near Champakanagar, Behulā played a trick on her mother-in-law. She went to Chāndo's house in the guise of a dom girl, carrying baskets and other articles of bamboo and talked with Sanakā. She reminded her of her lost daughter-in-law and made her think of her son. Then Behulā told her that she would like something to eat but that she would go out to perform her ablution first. She came back to the boats which had now reached Rāmeśvar Ghāṭ and told Lakhindar about Sanakā.

After a consultation it was decided that the captain Durlabha should meet Chāndo and propose to him that he should worship Manasā if he wanted his sons and the rest back, warning him that otherwise Manasā would again kill his sons and take away the boats with the cargo. Durlabha was followed by a procession. Chāndo was informed of it and he sent Paṇḍit Somāi to enquire about it. On the way

Somāi and Durlabha met and the former learnt the whole story of Behulā's adventures and of the proposal. They both returned to Chāndo to whom the story was retold by Durlabha. The news of Behulā's successful return with her husband Lakhindar, her six brothers-in-law and the crews created a sensation among the people. Chāndo accompanied by Sanakā, priests and advisors, came to Rāmeśvar Ghāt to give them all a hearty welcome. Chāndo and Sanakā were surprised and happy to see their lost sons and they greeted Behulā with the greatest kindness; they rejoiced that their daughter-in-law had shown herself possessed of qualities which are not generally found on earth. There was immense joy and rejoicing among them. Behulā told Chāndo the story of her former life in heaven and of her oath to Manasā. She added that she had promised Manasā that her father-in-law would worship her.

Now Chāndo was urged to worship Manasā not only by Sanakā and Behulā but also by every one else. Before finally agreeing to do so he expressed a desire to examine the power of Manasā once more, saying that he would worship her only if his seven boats were to arrive at his house gate, sailing on the land. Behulā prayed to Manasā to fulfil the desire of his father-in-law.

Manasā consulted Neto and asked her how it could be done. It was decided that snakes could carry the boats, so Manasā ordered seven of her most powerful snakes to carry the boats to the gate from Rāmeśvar Ghāt. This was done, and Chāndo was so impressed that he made full arrangements for the worship of Manasā. A sacred gold pot of Manasā was placed in his house, and Brahmans were invited to perform the rites. Chāndo bathed and put on a fresh garment. The sacred pot was worshipped with offerings of various fruits and animals. Chāndo not only worshipped Manasā but also her relatives and servants such as Jaratkāru, her husband, Āstika, her son, Neto, her advisor and snakes. Manasā appeared, Chāndo begged her pardon and asked her to place her foot on his head as an act of blessing. Manasā gave Chāndo back his mahājñan and his six sons, but not Lakhindar and Behulā, whom she wanted to take away with her in her chariot. Behulā and Lakhindar bade farewell to Chāndo and Sanakā and left with Manasā.

On the way Behulā requested Manasā to allow her and her husband to pay a last visit to her parents. Dressed as a yogī couple, Behulā and Lakhindar begged in the streets of the city of Ujāni and at last came to the door of Sāhe's house. Sumitrā requested them to stay for a while, as their presence reminded her of her daughter and son-in-law.



She told them the tragic story, which moved Behulā so much that she revealed her identity. Behulā was cordially embraced by her mother to whom she told the story of her former and her present life. Sumitrā wept, but the couple had to return to the chariot.

Finally they reached their destination and Manasā presented them before Indra, who wanted to examine their purity during their mortal lives. They had to face three tests. First, they were asked to walk on the sharp edge of a razor; secondly, they were thrown into the deep sea with huge stones attached to their waists, and lastly, they were placed in a chamber made of lac, which was set on fire. But they came successfully through all these tests and were accepted by Indra, who reappointed them to their previous posts of court dancers as Anirudha and Ushā.

#### Variations in other versions.

The stories of Manasā as treated by the other five poets under examination are similar to that of Bipradās in broad outline. Most of the differences are mentioned while treating the various aspects of the cult in later chapters. The variations in the stories which have not been treated elsewhere are given below.

<sup>1</sup>  
Nārāyaṇ Deb:

1. Neto was born after the semen of Śiva was discharged, but before the birth of Manasā. After the discharge of semen Śiva sweated and he washed the sweat away with a piece of cloth (netā in Bengali), which he threw away. Out of this sweat a girl was born and she was named Neta (i.e. Neto) from the cloth in which she had originated. As soon as she was born she was sent by Śiva to Kailāsa to live with Gaṅgā. On the way the sage Aṣṭabakra cursed Neto and said that she was to serve as the divine washer-woman and work for her younger sister Manasā because of her impertinence.

2. When Manasā introduced herself to Śiva as his daughter, Śiva challenged her identity and asked her to show her power. Manasā disappeared, dressed herself with snake ornaments and reappeared and looked through her "poison eye" at Śiva, who immediately fell into a swoon. Then Śiva was brought back to life by Manasā at the request of the gods and the sages.

3. Neither the story of the churning of the ocean nor the Purāṇic episodes dealt with in the sections I-IV above are found in this version. The reference to Manasā's marriage with a sage is made without any details.

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1. Nārāyaṇ Deb, Padmāpurāṇ, (Ed.by) T.C.Das Gupta.

4. The Hāsan and Husen story is absent. It is only said that they put Manasā in trouble and finally surrendered.
5. References are not made to Chāndo's mahājñān given by Śiva and to Manasā's repeated attacks on Chāndo's garden. Chāndo is referred to as a strict devotee of Śiva.
6. No mention is made of the Dhanvantari episode. Manasā's quarrel with Dhanvantari finds only passing reference. The Dhanā-Manā episode is found only in Bipradās.
7. The Ushā-Anirudha episode has been treated differently. Manasā's visit to Indra and her direct action against Anirudha are not found. Having received the news of the death of Ushā and Anirudha, Manasā sent a messenger to Yama to allow their souls to be occupied and used by her. But Yama refused and a great fight took place between Manasā and Yama. With the help of her snakes Manasā won the fight and was able to obtain the souls of Ushā and Anirudha, which were inserted in the wombs of Sumitrā and Sanakā respectively.
8. There is no mention of the death of Chāndo's six sons by snake-bite; but it is assumed by the poet that this was known to his readers, for he states that relations between Chāndo and Sanakā were not cordial after the death of their six sons, as the latter blamed the former for the loss. Since then they lived separately. But under the spell of Manasā they were again united and were tormented with sexual desire even in their old age. They had sexual intercourse

and the soul of Anirudha was inserted in the womb of Sanakā so that Lakhindar would be born to them. In the same way Ushā was born to Sumitā and Sāhe of Ujāni as Behulā.

9. Reaching home after the shipwreck Chāndo was angry at the sight of a young man in the bedroom of his wife and began to beat him. On the entrance of Sanakā the brawl stopped. She told Chāndo that the boy was his son, at which he was very cheerful.

10. Chāndo accompanied by his son and his attendants including soldiers, went out to visit the house of Sāhe at Ujāni to see Behulā, the bride of Lakhindar. On the way he left his protective in the nearest village, Golāṭnagar, where he saw Behulā bathing in a river. He continued his journey with his son. They reached the house of Sāhe in the guise of merchants of Sāṅkhapur. There they told Sāhe that they had just returned from a twelveyear sea-voyage in which he had lost everything and expressed their desire to take a meal in his house. Sāhe agreed and Chāndo told him the difficulty of the rules which governed his diet. He handed over some iron pills which were cooked by Behulā. Then after the meal both Chāndo and his son left the house and on the way they met their attendants near the village. A skirmish took place between the attendants of Chāndo and the people of Sāhe. Very soon the parties recognised one another and Sāhe came to know that it was

Chāndo who had visited his house in the guise of the merchant. The two became friends. Chāndo, Lakhindar and the attendants were cordially received by Sāhe at his house when Chāndo revealed the reason for his coming. Sāhe agreed to the proposal of marriage between Lakhindar and his daughter Behulā, and the date was settled. This episode is peculiar to this version only.

11. Dhanvantari was brought back to life by Manasā at the request of Behulā. This is peculiar to the east Bengal versions.

12. When Behulā returned after the recovery of the lost lives and property, she was asked by Chāndo and Sanakā to undergo some tests which were prescribed by their caste customs. Behulā had been alone for six months, and people suspected her chastity, as in the case of Sītā of the Rāmāyana. The tests were carried out and Behulā came through them successfully, and proved that she was pure and devoted only to her husband. Then she was accepted by her family.

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Bijay Gupta.

1. Suspecting that Manasā was the concubine of Śiva, Chāndī beat Manasā mercilessly at her first meeting. Manasā, finding no other alternative, took the form of

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1. Bijay Gupta, Padmā-Purāṇ, (Ed. by) B.K. Bhattacharyā.

a snake, bit Chāṇḍī, and disappeared. Other versions also record the change of Manasā into a snake when she bit Chāṇḍī. Chāṇḍī fell senseless, but was brought back to life by Manasā as told by Bipradās. Manasā, according to Bipradās, was not allowed by Chāṇḍī to stay in the house of Śiva. But Bijay Gupta records that Manasā stayed there for a certain period, though Chāṇḍī did not approve. She was given in marriage to the sage Jaratkāru while staying there. Jaratkāru soon left Manasā. Before his departure he conferred the boon that eight nāga children and a sage named Āstika would be born to Manasā. In due time Manasā bore eight nāga children. No reference to the birth of Āstika and the part played by him is found in this version.

Manasā's living in the house of Śiva was not liked by Chāṇḍī and they quarrelled. One day their quarrel was so serious that Chāṇḍī expressed the desire to leave the house and asked Śiva to stay with her daughter. As a result Śiva took Manasā away, reached Jayantinagar and asked Manasā to stay there permanently.

2. The reference to Sugandhā sitting on the right side of Manasā as a second attendant of Manasā occurs only in this text.

3. The story of ~~Sw~~abhi (Kapilā in other versions) and her calf Manorath, and the consequent story of the churning

of the ocean are very briefly told.

4. The story of Chāndo's birth is also peculiar to this version. One day Chāndo plucked flowers at Jayantinagar to worship Śiva and he came to the spot where Manasā sat on her throne, dressing herself with snakes. All the snakes were frightened and disappeared at the presence of Chāndo. Their departure left Manasā naked. She was very angry and cursed Chāndo that he would be born as a member of the merchant caste on earth. Chāndo replied that until he worshipped Manasā, her worship would not be propagated on earth. It was for this reason that he had been reborn as the son of Bijay at Champaknagar. He was a strict devotee of Śiva and did not look on Manasā as a goddess though he grudgingly allowed his wife to worship her.

5. The Dhanvantari episode is dealt with quite differently in this text. When Manasā destroyed the garden of Chāndo and killed the attendants, Chāndo took the help of his friend Dhanvantari who revived the garden and the attendants through his mahājñān. Dhanvantari who is often referred to as Saṅkur was a disciple of Neto. Neto taught him the mahājñān and conferred on him the boom of immunity from snake bite. Dhanvantari's help to Chāndo caused great anger in Manasā who sought advice from Neto. Neto refused to help as Dhanvantari was a great disciple of her.

When asked by his wife Kamalā, Dhanvantari told her the story of how he had obtained the mahājñān from the goddess Neto. He had worshipped her from his boyhood and Neto was so pleased with him that she went with him to the sea shore imparting the mahājñān to him. There he was taught the mahājñān by Neto who magically boiled a certain quantity of rice in a vessel without fire and water. While she was doing so snakes appeared from all sides. Neto took a snake in her hands and put it in the vessel. When the rice was boiled, Neto asked Dhanvantari to eat it from a plate, not wasting a single grain. When Neto enquired whether he had eaten it all, he answered that he had. Later it was noticed that one grain below the plate had remained uneaten. This enraged Neto who thought that Dhanvantari had tried to cheat her. She told him that though he possessed the boon of immunity from snake bite, there was one loophole in this boon. She said: "Do not neglect snakes on account of this boon. You will die if the snake Takshaka bites your forehead when you are sleeping on a bed with your wife on Tuesday of the new-moon of Bhādra. You will not be able to remember any mantras at that time. Of course you will be saved by using medicine but the medicine will not produce any effect if it is not applied within daśa dāṇḍa."



Then she went home. From that time Dhanvantari or Sankur became the terror of snakes. Knowing the secret of Dhanvantari's life Manasā killed him, and his dead body was deposited with Gaṅgā. Dhanvantari was brought back to life by Manasā at the request of Behulā.

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### Ketakādās-Kshemānanda

1. Manasā's quarrel with Hāsan and Husen and their final surrender are only mentioned.

2. The Dhanvantari episode is given in a form similar to that of Bipradās. After the loss of the mahājñān Chāndo was once more given such power by Dhanvantari. But the loss of the second mahājñān is not mentioned. The position is confused.

3. The Ushā-Anirudha episode differs from the versions of both Bipradās and Nārāyan Deb. Ushā, the daughter of Bānarājā, won the favour of Śiva for her extreme austerities. She asked the blessings of Śiva so that she would be able to marry Anirudha, the son of Kṛishṇa. Śiva blessed her. Anirudh and Ushā married secretly without the consent of their respective guardians and the latter became pregnant. As soon as Bānarājā heard the news, he grew very angry. Then followed a great war between Bāna and Anirudha and it was

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1. Ketakādās-Kshemānanda, Manasā-Maṅgal, (Ed.by) J.M. Bhattacharya.

only ended by the intervention of Chāṇḍī. In this war Vishṇu and Śiva supported Anirudha and Bāna respectively. After that Anirudha and Ushā were taken away by Kṛishṇa in his chariot to heaven, where they were married again. Anirudha's audacity annoyed Śiva, who cursed him that he would be bitten by the snake Kālī in his next mortal life. He was cursed only because he boasted before Śiva that he did not care for the snake Kālī. Being shocked at this, Anirudha and Ushā committed suicide by throwing themselves in the river Sarayū, and were reborn as Lakhindar and Behulā.

4. In this version Chāṇḍo is said to have been born out of the sea at the tenth churning of the ocean. This story is peculiar to Ketakādās.

5. The names of Behulā's mother and of the village of Sāhe are Amalā and Nichhāni respectively.

6. The account of the visit of Behulā and Lakhindar to the house of Sāhe occurs in a different place in the story. It comes while they were returning from heaven after Behulā had won the life of the latter and not on the way back to heaven at the end of their mortal life as told by Bipradās and Nārāyaṇ Deb.

Baṃśīdās.<sup>1</sup>

1. There was a hermit named Paśusakhā. Once while he was

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1. Baṃśīdās Rāy, Padmāpurāṇ, (Ed. by) Ramanath Chakravarty and Dvarakanath Chakravarty.

engaged in meditation on the bank of Gaṅgā, he saw two fledglings floating down on the current of the river. He felt pity for them and rescued them. He looked after them and they grew up under his fostering care. One day these pets were eaten by the snakes of Manasā, and this roused great anger in him. He made a pilgrimage into the tīrtha of Desire<sup>1</sup> where he committed suicide with the desire that in the next birth he would be a terror to the snakes and not be bitten by them. This hermit was reborn as Chāndo.

2. When Chāndo was on a trading voyage, the worship of Manasā was introduced into his family by his wife Sanakā. Chāndo came back and heard of this. He believed that Chāṇḍī, his patron goddess and Manasā were identical. He went to bed at night intending to worship Manasā in the morning. During the night however he was instructed by Chāṇḍī in a dream not to worship Manasā. She reminded him of his inimical relations with snakes in his former birth. In the morning he broke the pot of Manasā and direct conflict started.

The story of the loss of the mahājñān of Chāndo is different from that of the other versions. On the advice of Neto Manasā pretended to practise penance in a forest. Neto in the guise of a roe appeared before Chāndo, who was

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1. It was believed that if any body died here with any desire, it would be fulfilled in the next birth. No such place is known in Bengal today.

out hunting. Neto lured Chāndo to follow her till he met Manasā, and then she disappeared. In astonishment Chāndo asked Manasā why she was practising penance. She replied that she did so in order to take revenge on snakes as the husband of her elder sister had died of snake bite. She added that she had made a vow to marry a man who was the possessor of mahājñān. Chāndo infatuated with her beauty, offered himself and told Manasā the mahājñān, consisting of only two syllables and a half. When she knew the spell Manasā disappeared and the story proceeds as in the other versions.

3. Dhanvantari was first born out of the churning of the ocean. He was reborn in the royal family of Kāśī and became famous by the name Sankha-Garudī. Once Dhanvantari had performed tricks with an Udayakāla snake, who, being fatigued, asked a sage to persuade Dhanvantari to free him. The sage requested Dhanvantari to let the snake go and to perform his tricks with other snakes. The latter refused and the former cursed him that he would die from a bite of such a snake. Dhanvantari tried to pacify the sage, who softened his curse, saying that he would die only for a period of twelve years; hence Dhanvantari was killed by Manasā and again he was brought back to life after twelve years.

Jagajjīban.

1. The stories of the birth of Dharma, his marriage with his own daughter Manasā and his death are peculiar to this version only. The story of Manasā's rebirth as Gaurī (Durgā) is also an interesting feature of this version.

2. Durgā who grew up in the family of the sage Hemanta, made love secretly with Śiva, who finally married her with the consent of his first wife Gaṅgā. On the morning after the marriage Śiva went out to pluck flowers in a garden. On the way, when he was bathing on a tank, he saw some Vidyādhari and became sexually excited. His semen was discharged and from it Manasā was born. He reached the garden and stayed there for twelve years. During this period Durgā twice visited him in the disguise and had intercourse with him, which resulted in the birth of Gaṇeśa and Kārtikeya. After twelve years Śiva on his way home again passed by the side of the tank. Then Manasā bowed down to him and narrated the story of her birth. The rest of the story is similar to that of the other versions.

3. After the separation of Manasā from her husband she

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1. Jagajjīlan, Manasāmāṅgal, (Ed.by) S.C.Bhattacharya and A. Das.

began to live in the forest where Āstika was born.

There she suffered poverty and in order to overcome this trouble she came down to earth with her child in the guise of a Brahman woman, appeared before the cowherds and begged milk for her child. Being refused she displayed her power and the cowherds finally recognised and worshipped her. Similarly the fisherman brothers Jālu and Mālu also started worshipping her.

4. The love-making of Lakhindar with his maternal aunt is peculiar to this Bengali version. As it was predicted that Lakhindar would die on his wedding night, his parents did not arrange for his marriage, for unless Lakhindar married, Manasā's plan would not be successful. So Manasā asked the help of Neto, who advised her to send the nymph Kāmasonā in the guise of Lakhindar's maternal aunt Kosalyā, in order to excite sexual desire in him. Kāmasonā came to the bedroom of Lakhindar, made love with him in a dream, and instructed him to go in the morning to the bank of a tank, where she would meet him again. Manasā appeared in the same night to Kosalyā in a dream and asked her to bathe in the morning in the same tank, promising that this would bring wealth and children to her. In the morning both Kosalyā and Lakhindar came. Seeing Kosalyā Lakhindar approached her in order to make love.

Kosalyā then told Lakhindar that she was his maternal aunt and he should not be so silly. Suddenly Lakhindar thought of the dream and told her that he had made love with her in a dream on the previous night. He added that there was no harm in love-making between a maternal aunt and a nephew, as Rādhā and Kṛishṇa had done so. Kosalyā tried to resist but without success. Lakhindar forcibly embraced and kissed her. The news was reported to Sanakā by Kosalyā. Sanakā did not believe it because of her son's young age. However, when Chāndo heard of his son's debauchery, he resolved to marry him off. Thus Lakhindar's marriage with Behulā was brought about by Manasā.

5. While coming home after the recovery of the lost lives and property, Behulā was attacked by a King, assisted by his toll-collector. She prayed to Manasā who saved her with the aid of her snakes. Except the King all the people were killed. Then the King asked help from Behulā, who advised him to worship Manasā. He did so, and in return the goddess restored the lost lives. This is not told by any other Bengali poet.

### Discussions.

The narrative of the Manasākāvyas is a compilation of different legends and stories which may be broadly

classified into two categories.

(1) Epic and Purāṇic stories

- a) The churning of the ocean
- b) The snake sacrifice by Janamejaya
- c) The hostility of Kadru and Vinatā
- d) The Ushā and Anirudha episode

(2) Secular stories, some associated with divinities

- a) The cowherds' episode
- b) The farmer Bachāi episode
- c) The story of the fisherman's family
- d) The story of Chāndo, Behulā and Lakhindar
- e) The Neto and Dhanvantari (or Saṅku Dhanvantari) episode.

It has been observed by E.O.James that "a higher living religion like Christianity, Judaism, Islam or Hinduism, by incorporating folk material into its own faith and practice, has given a new vigour, meaning, significance and function to popular beliefs and customs, and so enabled them to acquire a fresh survival value".<sup>1</sup> The same tendency is found in the case of the local goddess Manasā who appears at times in epic and Purāṇic garb. The reason behind the incorporation of the epic and Purāṇic

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1. Nvmen, Vol-IX, Fasc.1, January 1962, p.15.



stories in the Manasākāvya was to give to the goddess Manasā the same social status as had been enjoyed by the major gods and goddesses of the Hindu pantheon, and to show that the goddess had a long antiquity. For this reason Manasā is identified with Jaratkāru, the sister of Vāsuki of the Mahābhārata story.

The story of the curse of Anirudha and his death followed by the death of his wife Ushā in heaven and their mortal birth as Lakhindar and Behulā is probably not a part of the original popular legend but a later creation of the poets. Of course the tradition of curses on divine characters and their mortal birth is known in literature. Behind the association of human characters with divine ones is an attempt to account for the possession of supernatural powers by the former. Behulā who was reborn on earth under a curse from Manasā is seen in a number of places in the poem to have more than human power, in might and endurance. A similar picture is found in the Chandīkāvya, where the hero Nilāmbar, the son of Indra, became a mortal under a curse, as did Anirudha and Ushā, and spread the cult of Mangal Chandī as Kālaketu.

Further examples can be found in the lives and characters of Chāndo and Dhanvantari. According to Baṃśīdās Chāndo was the hermit Paśuśakhā in his former birth and was reborn as Chāndo.<sup>1</sup> Ketakadās records that

1. Supra, pp. 181 f. ; Baṃśīdās, op.cit., pp. 160-161.

Chāndo came out of the sea at the churning of the ocean and was given the Brahmajñāna by Śiva.<sup>1</sup> Dhanvantari, according to Bamsīdās, was first born out of the churning of the ocean and was then reborn in the royal family of Kāśī and became known as the great poison doctor Sankha Garuḍī.<sup>2</sup> Other versions do not refer to the second birth of Dhanvantari.

The birth stories of Manasā and Neto belong to a later period in the evolution of the cult. The reason behind the story of the former's birth from Śiva's semen was to connect the low born goddess Manasā with the established deity who was also known as Mahādeva, the great god, so that the higher class people might worship her, and that she might be acceptable as a goddess within the Hindu pantheon.<sup>3</sup> The birth story of Neto has also got some such reason. It has been suggested by A. Bhatta-charya that the episode of Sankar (Sanku or Sankha in the versions of Bijay Gupta and Bamsīdās respectively) Garuḍī and Neto, which has already been narrated,<sup>4</sup> is a different story entirely and is older than the Manasā story.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Supra, p. 181.; Ketakādās, op.cit., pp. 22-23.
  2. Supra, p. 183.; Bamsīdās, op.cit., pp. 221-222
  3. Infra, pp. 300, 311f.
  4. Supra, pp. 183.
  5. Folklore, Vol. 1, No. 2, pp. 100f.

He believes: "... the daughter of some washerwoman acquired some knowledge about things that are capable of counteracting poison and was deified in popular estimation in the course of time. Her eminence in society is anterior to that of Manasā. Subsequently when the legend of Lakhindar and Behulā was introduced, she was relegated to the position of Manasā's companion and she occupied only a niche in the narrative. Save and except this there is no reasonable meaning of her existence within the framework of the narrative of Manasā." <sup>1</sup>

The story of Neto and Saṅku or Saṅkha Dhānvantari needs discussion. From the version of Bijay Gupta it is known that Saṅku was a disciple of Neto, who, according to Bhattacharya, was deified for her power to counteracting poison. It may be that Neto was worshipped before the goddess Manasā evolved in society. When Manasā became prominent, Neto lost her popularity and became the adviser and sister of Manasā. As Manasā's relationship with Siva was a later creation so also was Neto's. Similarly the status of Saṅku, the chief among the disciples of Neto was increased by connecting him with Dhānvantari of the Mahābhārata and the Purāṇas. Thus the ordinary poison doctor became the divine poison doctor.

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1. Ibid., p.101.

Behind these tendencies to incorporate the epic and the Purāṇic stories with popular material and to connect human characters with divine ones in the story of Manasā we may recognize an attempt on the part of the poets to give high social status to a goddess who had her origin in lower circles. The secular stories had their origin in different periods and circles, as we shall see later.<sup>1</sup>

#### B. Assam

Two fragmentary and incomplete manuscripts each containing the work of Manakar<sup>2</sup> and Durgābar have been edited.<sup>3</sup> The two poets share the story between them,

1. Infra, pp. 271-297.
2. S. Sen doubts that the name Manakar is a corruption for Manahar (Manohar) as it is unusual. He has tried to establish his theory by referring to the name of a poet Manohar, once occurs in the Manasāmāṅgal of Jīban Krishna Maitra, an 18th century poet of north Bengal. But Sen's explanation is very imaginative, depending as it does on such a slender connexion, especially as the work of Jīban Krishna is so much later than the Assamese text. This interpretation seems far-fetched and out of the question. (Bipradās, op.cit., p. Intro., XXII.).
3. The name Manasā as referring to the snake goddess of Assam never occurs in any song of the Assamese version, entitled 'Manasā-Kāvya' and edited by B.K. Barua and S.N. Sarma. So the title of the book is not in accordance with the text. In fact the word Mānasāi appears four times. (pp. 15, 88, 89.) as one of the names of the goddess. It seems probably to be the corruption of Manasā. It further suggests that the snake goddess of Assam has been given the name Manasā after the composition of the songs by the poets of early sixteenth century. The goddess is referred to in this text as Vishahāri or Padmā.

Manakar's text containing the earlier part and Durgābar's the latter. Both the poets have been assigned to the first half of the 16th century.<sup>1</sup>

The version of Manakar contains three chapters - the story of creation, the love-making of Siva and Durgā, and their marriage and of the birth of Manasā. The story is as follows:

The Creator or Ādyā Gosāi first created a pair of birds. Once the female one made a proposal to the male for their marriage but he refused on the ground that brother and sister could never marry each other. Thus they started living separately. One day the male bird was sexually excited and his semen was discharged on the water of a river. That semen was unknowingly taken by the female bird and she became pregnant. After that they were married. The female laid three eggs and out of these all living beings were created.

The Creator (Dharma) examined the powers of Brahmā, Vishnu and Siva. While the three were engaged on meditation in different places, on the river side, Dharma in the guise of a dead man let his body float on the current. When the dead body came in front of Brahmā, he pushed it away with his feet. Almost similar treatment was given by

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1. See Appendix A.PP. 517 f

Vishnu, who felt great annoyance at this unwelcome sight at the time of meditation. But when it came in front of Śiva he recognized it as the dead body of his own father. So he carried it to the shore and started pouring water into the mouth from a conch shell. At last Dharma came to life and praised Śiva for his spiritual qualities, which were lacking in Brahmā and Vishnu who could not understand who he was. Śiva was given charge of Gaṅgā and Durgā, and Dharma himself expressed his desire to enter into Śiva. Śiva let him in through his mouth. Śiva married Gaṅgā, and Durgā was set adrift on the river in an iron box, which miraculously did not sink.<sup>1</sup> This came into the possession of the sage Hemanta engaged in the devotions by the river. Durgā grew up in the house of the sage.

The second chapter deals with the legend of Śiva, starting from his creation of the bull to his marriage with Durgā. Śiva started his family life with Gaṅgā as his wife. He made a bull and a flower garden with the help of Viśvakarmā. His primary intention in creating the garden was to make love in it to Durgā. Durgā felt a great desire to pluck flowers in the beautiful garden.

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1. Manasā-Kāvya, pp. 9-10.

One day she dressed herself as impressively as possible and went into the garden. Her arrival there was reported to Śiva, who realised that the girl was none other than his long-expected second wife. Śiva came into the garden and started to make love with Durgā. They were enamoured of each other and stayed together for a few days. Durgā was in great trouble at the thought of returning to his father's house. By this time Gaṅgā was informed by Nārada of Śiva's secret love. She was angry and sent her two sons to drown Durgā when she crossed the river. But they were not successful. When Durgā reached home she was suspected and questioned by her father Hemanta, who asked her to undergo tests, as he doubted her chastity, for she had spent a few days away from home. Durgā magically restored her own virginity and successfully passed the eight tests. In the meantime Śiva appealed to Gaṅgā to allow him to marry Durgā. Gaṅgā abused him and declared that he was too old and poor to take a second wife. But finally she reluctantly agreed. Then Nārada was asked to negotiate the marriage, which took place with the performance of all customary rites. Thus Śiva began to live with his two wives - Gaṅgā and Durgā.

In the last chapter the story of the birth of Manasā is narrated. As it is told in the Bengali versions, Durgā suspected Śiva, who placed his flower-basket on the

sloping roof, unlike his usual practice of handing it to one of his wives. When Durgā tried to bring down the basket, Manasā in the guise of a fly, still inside the basket, mocked her. Here the story of Manakar ends without completion. But it is to be noted that the poet was well acquainted with the rest of the story, as is evident from the last line of his songs of the creation myth: "(Padmā) will bite Lakhāi by entering into the room made of metal."<sup>1</sup>

The story of Durgābar supplements it. The story begins with the description of the city of Champābalī (i.e., Champaka) on the bank of Gaṅgā. There lived a wealthy merchant named Chāndo with his wife ~~Sanakā~~ Sanakā. Chāndo was a great devotee of Śiva and never cared for any other gods and goddesses.<sup>2</sup> Though they were rich, they were not happy as they were neglected by society, because they had no child.

Once in the rainy season an ojhā named Dhanvantari came to the city from the north and tried to draw attention by beating a drum in front of the house. ~~Sanakā~~ Sanakā came out and enquired who was the goddess he was praising and what blessing might be expected from her. Then he proclaimed his faith in the following words: "The varied

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1. Manasā-Kāvya, p.15.

2. Ibid., p.87.



powers of the goddess cannot be explained. A childless person gets a child and a prisoner becomes free, if the goddess is worshipped in the form of a pot in the house. One has to worship her after a day's fast and to offer her five flowers of gold. Then one should bathe in the river Gaṅgā, repeating the saying 'Mānasāi-Māi'. After all these performances, one is blessed by the goddess with what is desired."<sup>1</sup>

Sanakā was very pleased with the ojhā and she did according to his directions, and on having her ritual bath she sank under the water saying 'Mānasāi-Māi'. As no blessing was awarded, Sanakā was distressed and desired to behead herself. This was reported to Gaṅgā, who appeared and gave Sanakā six flowers to eat. She promised her that she would become the mother of six sons and then she disappeared. Sanakā's joy knew no bounds at this blessing. In due time six sons were born to Chāṇḍo and Sanakā. They grew up and were married. As Chāṇḍo spent much money in the marriage ceremonies of his children, he planned a trading voyage to Siṃhalā (Ceylon) to replenish his treasury. All arrangements for the sea-voyage were made. The customary rite of boat-worship before the voyage was arranged by Sanakā. While collecting the requisites of worship, she went to the

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1. Ibid., pp.88.

nearest fisherwoman's house to purchase a particular fish called māgur. There she noticed the fisherwoman Sāradaī accompanied by her six daughters-in-law, worshipping the sacred pot of Manasā. She enquired of Sāradaī which goddess she was worshipping. Then Sāradaī told her that she was the daughter of Śiva and added: "One who worships her is blessed with all kinds of blessings"<sup>1</sup>. This news excited Sanakā, who returned to the house with the fish and finished the rite of boat worship. Then Sanakā and Chāndo came to the sea-shore and the latter started his journey.

Sanakā came home and, accompanied by her six daughters-in-law, started worshipping Manasā. While she was worshipping, one of the attendants of Chāndo came back from the boat to fetch a chopper. He returned to the boat and told Chāndo that his mistress was worshipping a pot. He was very angry to hear this, came back to the house and kicked the pot to pieces. Sanakā was warned by Chāndo not to worship Manasā again, as he did not recognise any deity except Śiva. Thus the feud was started; Chāndo returned to the boats and resumed his journey.

In the absence of Chāndo, his six sons were bitten one

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1. Manasā-Kāvya, p.96.

by one by snakes, at the command of Manasā. When the Ojhā Dhanvantari was asked for treatment, he was warned by Manasā not to go. He obeyed and the six sons died. The dead bodies were kept by the washerwoman Netanā or Neto. Meanwhile Chāndo began to return after a successful voyage, and on the way all his twelve boats sank and their crews were drowned at the command of Manasā. Gaṅgā assisted Manasā in the project. Here the course of the story is similar to the Bengali versions.

Chāndo returned home after much toil and trouble and told everything to Sanakā, who declared that these things had happened only because he kicked the pot of Manasā. Manasā appeared before Chāndo and Sanakā in the guise of a Brahman widow and told them to stop arguing. Her primary intention was to insert the soul of Anirudha into the womb of Sanakā. After that she left the place. Ten months passed and Sanakā gave birth to a boy, who was named Lakhindar. The child grew up and it was announced by a palmist that he would be bitten by a snake on his wedding night. However, when Lakhindar was sixteen, he was given in marriage to Behulā. To guard his son's life Chāndo asked the couple to pass the wedding night in a sealed chamber. But Lakhindar was bitten by the snake Ajagarā, the husband of Manasā, who could not ignore

the request of his wife. As the snake Kālī in the Bengali versions, Ajagarā was trapped by Behulā. Dhanvantari was asked to treat Lakhindar but on the way he also was bitten, by the goddess herself in the guise of a poisonous snake. Four of his disciples were sent to bring medicine to cure him, but none returned. Both the ojhā Dhanvantari and Lakhindar died without treatment. The corpse of the latter was placed on a raft. Behulā sat behind the corpse and the raft was set adrift on the river. Behulā took the snake Ajagarā, a peacock and a mongoose with her. Then the story resembles that of the Bengali versions till Behulā meets Netō. Behulā alighted from the raft to collect wood for the funeral pyre of her husband, and she determined to put an end to her own life. Before she had taken the final step, she desired to feed the peacock and the mongoose with the snake which had bitten her husband. Knowing the thoughts of Behulā, Manasā feared for the life of her husband and told Netō to prevent Behulā, swearing to bring Lakhindar back to life. Netō did so and by her help Behulā reached heaven. There she performed a dance and finally Lakhindar, the other six sons of Chāndo, the crews and the property of Chāndo taken by Manasā, were brought back to life by the grace of the goddess. Then all started on the journey back to Champābālī

but on the way Behulā was imprisoned by the toll-collector of a King. The king was informed of this news.\*

The lost lives of the relatives and of the children of the king were restored (possibly by Manasā as told by Jagajjīban). The king with his wife worshipped the goddess.\*

Sanakā dreamt in the night of her son's return. Behulā appeared before Sanakā in the guise of a dom girl but soon Behulā told her that she was her daughter-in-law.\*

Then the party entered the city of Champābalī and Sanakā went out to receive her seven sons. Here the story ends. As the manuscript is mutilated here and there, there are many gaps. For this reason no reference is made to the submission of Chāndo to the goddess Manasā, which is the central point of the story.

The story of the 16th century Assamese poets closely resembles that of the 17th century poet Jagajjīban of north Bengal. The stories of the love-making of Śiva and Durgā and of the king who attacked Behulā on her return

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\* Gaps occur in the manuscript at these places.

journey are similarly told. The latter story is only referred to in the Assamese version. As the manuscript is mutilated, the details can be reconstructed from the version of Jagajjīban.

The following are the differences between the Assamese and the Bengali versions.

(1) The story of the creation of a pair of birds by Ādyā Gosāi (Dharma) and of the birth of Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Śiva from three eggs are not found in any other Manasākāvya.

(2) The story that before Dharma died he handed over the charge of Gaṅga and Durgā to Śiva is also peculiar to this version.

(3) The story of the propagation of the cult of a goddess (possibly of Manasā) by the ojhā Dhanvantari is not narrated by any other poet. It is somewhat confusing as the character of the goddess is not specifically mentioned. The appearance of Gaṅgā in this story is also peculiar.

(4) As told in the version of Bipradās, the worship of Manasā in the family of Chāndo was initiated by Sanakā, who learnt of the goddess from a family of a fisherman caste.

(5) The epic and Purāṇic stories are not found in this version.

That the Assamese version records the story in its

developed phase is evident from the fact that there is no reference in it to Manasā as a goddess of snakes. As already observed, the goddess is referred to in this text as to be worshipped for other purposes.

### C. Bihar.

The published Bihari versions are not based on manuscripts as in Bengal and Assam but on oral tradition. In these versions only the principal legend of Chāndo, Behulā and Lakhindar is told, and it belongs to the realm of folk poetry.<sup>2</sup> The story runs:

Mahādeva (Śiva) and Pārvatī lived in a temple (maṭha) in Kokilāpur, where Śiva used to bathe in the lake Sonādaha. One day he sank under the water of the lake, and when he floated up, he saw five strands of his hair attached to five lotus flowers. These five flowers and five strands of hair together brought forth the five sisters of Manasā.<sup>3</sup> They are Mainā Vishaharī, Ditiā Bhavānī, Devī Vishaharī, Jayā Vishaharī and Padumā Kumārī. They spent twelve years in performing the dance known as Jhumar<sup>4</sup> in the lotus lake and then they dived down to Pātāla, where

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1. Almost the same text has been published from different places in different periods (i.e., Bihulā-Kathā, (Pub. by Binduprasad Misra, Patna, 1917; Ibid., (Pub. by) Ramagulam Lal, Benares, 1924; Ibid., (Pub. by) Darbarī Sāmha, Benares, 1925; Ibid., Published from Darbhanga, 1936; Bihulā Kā Gīta, Pub. from Benares, 1938; Bihulā-Vishaharī (New ed.), Pub. & Printed by Dudhnāth Pustakalay, Calcutta, 1956.
  2. Bihulā-Vishaharī, Calcutta, 1956.
  3. Ibid., p. 3.
  4. A popular folk dance of Bihar and eastern U.P.

they met Vāsuki. They enquired of him about their ancestors. Vāsuki told them that their spiritual parents were Mahādeva and Pārvatī. They came back to their original place and hid themselves in five lotuses.

Siva came as usual, plucked the lotus flowers wherein the five sisters had hidden themselves, and carried them home. Keeping the flowers in a basket he entered the temple for the daily prayer and meditation. When Pārvatī noticed the flowers, five beautiful maidens came out of them and approached her, calling her their mother. As told in the Bengali versions Pārvatī suspected them being concubines of her husband and threw a log at them to drive them away. It struck Mainā Vishaharī on her eyebrow, and, assuming the form of a thread like snake, she bit Pārvatī, as told in some Bengali versions. Pārvatī fainted, and Siva came to help her. When he failed to revive her, he asked the help of an occultist named Keso. His attempt bore no result as Mainā Vishaharī counteracted it by her greater power. Then the five sisters appeared before Siva, and Devī Vishaharī and Dītila Bhavānī brought their mother back to life. As a reward Siva blessed them that they would be worshipped by men, especially by the merchant Chāndo of Chaupāi-nagar, who worshipped thirty three crores of deities.



The five sisters went to Chāndo and asked him to worship them. But Chāndo refused to worship them as they were "one-eyed" and "frog-eaters". Then they appeared before Sanakā, who was then performing the customary rites of boat worship as her husband was about to sail on a trading voyage. They asked her to worship Mainā Vishaharī, but they were driven away by Chāndo who came up before his wife could express an opinion. They came to Indra and begged from him Hanumān and his dancer (i.e. Anirudha). Indra reluctantly agreed. Again they came back to Chāndo with the same request to worship them, with promises of all round prosperity, but it was of no use. Then they left the place, warning him to prepare for the future misfortunes.

Chāndo, accompanied by his six sons, set sail for the port of Lankā (Ceylon). When Chāndo reached Trivenī the five sisters requested him once more to worship them, but to no avail. Similar was the result when Hanumān, on behalf of all the other gods, requested Chāndo to worship them. Finally at the command of Manasā,<sup>1</sup> Hanumān sank all the boats. Chāndo alone was kept alive, and was thrown upon land by Hanumān, not floating on the river as in the Bengali versions. There in the guise of a Gorakhiyā Yogi

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1. Possibly the text here refers to Mainā Vishaharī who seems to be the leader of the sisters.

Hanumān appeared before Chāndo and told him that it was Mainā Vishaharī who was the cause of his trouble and that if he worshipped her, she would return the lost lives and property. But Chāndo did not change his attitude. The story then follows the familiar track. As in Jagajjīban's version the story of debauchery of Lakhindar with his maternal aunt Kośilā (Kosalyā in Jagajjīban) is narrated.

Lakhindar and Behulā were married and retired to bed on the wedding night in a sealed chamber. First Dhorā and Dhamnā were sent by Manasā to bite Lakhindar, but they were unsuccessful. As advised by Dītilā Bhavānī they consulted with Netulā (i.e., Neto) for further procedure. Netulā advised them to go to Śiva, and to ask him for three gifts - i) the four stars (that cause rain and storm), ii) something to produce drowsiness, and iii) the serpent Maniyār. All these three gifts were sanctioned by Śiva. With the help of the stars they caused rain and storm, at which many of the guards left the courtyard of the sealed chamber and those who were still present were under the influence of drowsiness. Now the snake Maniyār entered the sealed chamber and bit Lakhindar.

Dhanottar (i.e. Dahanvantari) was called to treat Lakhindar, but on the way he was bitten by snakes at the

command of the five sisters. Then Lakṣhindar died and, as desired by Behulā, an iron box was made and she started her journey from Gokul Gaṅgā Ghāṭ with the corpse in order to bring back the life of her husband from Manasā in Mayanāgar. After much toil and suffering, as told in the Bengali versions, Behulā reached Netulā's Ghāṭ, where she saw Netulā kill her son and husband before she started washing. After Netulā's work she tried to bring them back to consciousness but failed, as Behulā cast a magic spell on them. Behulā then came to her and addressed her as aunt. Behulā countermanded her magic at the request of Netulā, who took her to Mayanāgar. There Behulā performed a dance which delighted the gods. Manasā, who was also present, brought back the life of Lakṣhindar. The other sons of Chāndo and the crew were also revived. The lost boats and the property of Chāndo were restored and the party returned to Chaupāinagar. The story then follows the familiar track.

The difference of the Bihari version from the Bengali and Assamese versions is the reference to five sisters of Manasā. This is no doubt of indigenous origin.

#### D. The Story of Manasā in the Purāṇas.

The story of Manasā is found in the Brahmavaivarta

Purāṇa<sup>1</sup> and the Devī-Bhāgavata.<sup>2</sup> Both the Purāṇas record the same story. It is as follows.

The story of Manasā was told by Nārāyaṇa to Nārada, who heard it from Dharma. Formerly people were afraid of snakes, as whoever was bitten by them had to suffer death. The sage Kaśyapa was terrified of them, and at the command of Brahmā he composed hymns which were in accordance with the principles found in the Vedas. Then the presiding deity of these hymns came out from the mind (manas) of the formulator Kaśyapa, who was in meditation. Hence the goddess is called Manasā. Then Manasā went to the residence of Śiva in Kailāsa, and adored and worshipped him for a period of a thousand years. As a result she acquired celestial Knowledge (mahājñāna), knowledge of the Vedas, and the mantra of Kṛishṇa, from Śiva. Next at the command of Śiva she went to Pushkara. There she prayed to Kṛishṇa for three Yugas, and became an adept of Kṛishṇa, who finally appeared before her. Kṛishṇa was so moved to see the emaciated Manasā that he himself worshipped her and made others do so. He also blessed her that she would be worshipped in the three worlds and then disappeared. She is also known as Manasā as she recollects

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1. Prakṛiti Khanda, Adhyāyas, 45, 46.

2. Devī-Bhāgavata, Ninth Chapter, Adhs. 47, 38ff; 48, 1-145.

or meditates on Hari in her own mind. She was first worshipped by Kṛishṇa, who was followed by Śiva, Kaśyapa, the gods, the Manus, the sages, snakes and men.

Then she was given in marriage to the sage Jaratkāru by her spiritual father Kaśyapa. The story follows as told in the Mahābhārata. Here Jaratkāru cursed Manasā (not Jaratkāru, the sister of Vāsuki of the Mahābhārata story). But finally his anger was appeased by the interference of the gods and he blessed Manasā with a child before he left her for good. Then Manasā went to her spiritual guide Śiva at Kailāsa. She was consoled there by Pārvatī for her bad luck. After the due period Manasā gave birth to a child named Āstika, with whom she went to the hermitage of her father. Both Manasā and Āstika lived there for a very long time.

The Mahābhārata story of the Parikshit's death by the bite of Takshaka, of the snake-sacrifice by Janamejaya, and of the part played by Āstika are told. According to the Purāṇas the gods, the sages and Indra asked help from Manasā at the time of the snake-sacrifice and the latter sent her son Āstika to stop it, and save the Nāga race from final destruction. The Brahmans, the sages, the gods and Indra worshipped Manasā separately. It is recorded:

"Whoever worships the goddess either on the last day of Āshāḍha or during the period beginning from Manasā Pañchamī

up to the end of Āśvina, is blessed with fame, celebrity, knowledge, virtues and prosperity from generation to generation. Whoever slanders the goddess ignorantly or does not worship her, is always afraid of snakes, and is deprived of the blessings of the goddess Lakshmī." ...

The Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa<sup>1</sup> records a conflict between the ojhā Dhanvantari and the goddess Manasā. Once while Dhanvantari was going towards Kailāsa, he was attacked by the snake Takshaka. Dhanvantari, astonished at the snake's impertinence, rendered him unconscious and then resumed his journey. This news was reported to Vāsuki by the other snakes who were with Takshaka at the time. Vāsuki took up the case and requested Manasā to punish Dhanvantari. Dhanvantari, who was a digit of Nārāyaṇa, a pupil of Garuḍa and of Śiva, fought vigorously with Manasā. Brahmā and Śiva interfered in the fight and on the advice of Brahmā Dhanvantari worshipped Manasā, who gave him the desired boon. Then all departed.

Thus in the Purāṇas Manasā is depicted as a higher goddess having no connection with the stories of popular

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1. Srīkrishna Janma Khanda, Adh.51.

origin. The assimilation of the folk goddess in the Hindu pantheon was completed when she was thought of as the mind born daughter of the sage Kaśyapa, as the disciple of Śiva and as the devotee of Kṛishṇa. The lead, which was started by the Manasāmāṅgal poets, was completed by the authors of these Purāṇas.

## CHAPTER IV

### Original Location and Historicity of the Principal Legend

#### Part - I

##### Section A.

Although the region where the legend of Manasā originated cannot be located with certainty for want of specific proofs, the content of the legend as it appears in Bengali, Assamese and Bihari, together with oral tradition, help us to suggest the most probable place.

##### Local traditions

Either the residence of the legendary hero or the site of an event in the story is believed locally to have been situated in the following places.

1. A village called Champakanagar in the district of Burdwan is believed to be the birth place of Chāndo. Moreover, a river close to the village is locally called Behulā, after the name of the great devotee of Manasā, as it is popularly believed that Behulā passed down this river with the corpse



of her husband in order to bring him back to life.<sup>1</sup>

2. At Mahasthangadh in the Bagra district there is "an interesting ruin known locally as the Medh or Behulār bāsar mandir, 'Behulā's bed-chamber'", where Behulā and Lakhindar are said to have retired to bed on the bridal night.<sup>2</sup>

3. There is a tradition in the eastern Himalayas that Chāndo lived on the bank of the river Rangit in the district of Darjeeling.<sup>3</sup> The Rangit, or Rangnit, is the northern boundary of Bengal and the southern boundary of the state of Sikkim.

4. The local people believe that Sanakāgram near Kāntanagar in Dinajpur is named after Sanakā and that the ruins of Chāndo's palace are found there.<sup>4</sup>

5. There is a village in Tripura named Champakanagar and this is believed locally to be the residence of the hero.<sup>5</sup>

6. The people of Champāinagar in Malda district claim that the hero lived there and in the same district it is generally believed that the quay where Neto, the legendary

1. D.C.Sen, H.B.L.L., p.256; K.C.A.Ahmed, (Compiled), Cach Behārer Itihāsa, Part 1, p.11; L.No.13 (Hooghly)

2. Sen, H.B.L.L., p.256; Ahmed, op.cit., p.11; A.R.A.S.I., 1920-21, p.25.

3. Sen, H.B.L.L., p.256; Ahmed, op.cit., p.11.

4. Ibid.

5. Sen, H.B.L.L., p.256; S.P.P., Vol.XXVII, B.S. 1327, p.167.

divine washerwoman, used to wash, was in their district.<sup>1</sup>

7. It is popularly believed by the inhabitants of Birbhum that the local fairs, held in honour of Behulā, were started during her lifetime in recognition of her devotion to Manasā.<sup>2</sup>

8. The people of Chittagong are proud to point out a certain spot as the location of the house of Kālukāmār, the builder of the sealed chamber, and a tank bearing the name of Chāndo is thought to be near the site of his home.<sup>3</sup>

9. The people of Sylhet also point out certain stone slabs lying on the river near Lāur mountain as remnants of "the quay of Neto" and of "Chāndo's boats".<sup>4</sup>

10. Local tradition tells of an iron room known as Meraghar at Chaigoan in Kamrup, and of quays in Dhubri and Hajo in the same district where Neto washed.<sup>5</sup>

11. It is believed that Chāndo lived in Champā or Champakanagar in the district of Bhagalpur, Bihar and that Ujāni, the birthplace of Behulā, was nearby.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid.

4. Śrī Śrī Padmapurāṇa O Bāiskavi Manasāmaṅgal, (Ed. by) Chandra Kanta Bhattacharya, Intro. pp.6f; S.P.P., Vol. XXVII, p.167.

5. Manasā-Kāvya, (Ed. by) B.K.Barua and S.N.Sarma, Intro.p.25.

6. Nikhilnath Ray, Mursidābāder Itihas, p.87; D.C.Sen, Varṅga Sāhitya Parichaya, Part 1, p.172; Kshemānanda Dās: Manasāmaṅgal, (Ed. by) Basanta Ranjan Ray, Intro., pp.4f.

It appears that the simple reason behind these local traditions is merely the wide popularity of the legend and the cult, which tempted the people of different localities to put forward such claims.

The second point of reference for determining the place or places of origin of the legend is the textual material now extant. Various claims have been urged by different scholars. The areas concerned are (1) Bihar, (2) South India and (3) West Bengal. No claim has been put forward in favour of other places.

#### BIHAR

The claim of Bihar (Aṅga country) has been put forward by Basanta Ranjan Ray, D.C.Sen, A.Bhattacharya and others.

B.R. Ray supports his view on the following grounds.<sup>1</sup>

(1) He believes that Chāndo lived in the district of Bhagalpur in the city of Champā which was the capital of the Aṅga country in the early period. He adds that close to the site of Champā there is a village named Ujāni, traditionally, the birthplace of Behulā. People also point out what are claimed to be the remnants of the sealed chamber and of the quay mentioned in the story. A fair is held in honour of Behulā in the month of Srāvaṇa near Nāthanagar.

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1. Kshemānanda Dās, op.cit., Intro. pp.4-7.

(2) It is alleged that some of the proper names including Lakhindar (Pali-Lamkinda), Behulā (Pali - Bahulā), Sāhebena (Sāyabene in the Maṅgā kāvyā), Chuhilā which in some versions is given as the name of the mother of Behulā and Pātra Dhobin, one of the names of Neto, suggest that the persons were inhabitants of the Aṅga country, and that later on the Bengali poets gave their names a Bengali form.

(3) The relative ages of the bride and the groom are cited in support of the case of Bihar. Lakhindar was a boy of 13 or 14 and Behulā appears to have been approximately of the same age when they married. In Bihar it was customary that the bride and the groom should be approximately of the same age, but that if there was any difference the bride should be older than the groom not vice versa. The argument continues that in Bengal it is customary for merchant families to arrange marriages of their daughters at an early age. Thus it would seem that the story of the marriage of Behulā and Lakhindar was based on the current practice in Bihar rather than on that current in Bengal. B.R. Ray explicitly states on the basis of this evidence that the marriage of Behulā and Lakhindar reflected practice customary in the Aṅga country and concludes that Chāndo must have been an inhabitant of that area.

N.Ray<sup>1</sup> agrees with this theory, but only up to a point. He records the tradition that the original home of Chāndo was in the Aṅga country but cites another tradition that Chāndo later in life migrated from Bihar to Rāṅgāmātī in the Murshidabad district. A certain village in that area is said to have been named Chāndpārā, after his name. He notes that there are other villages of the name, already noticed, Champakanagar in the Burdwan district and Tripura, but claims that the original Champakanagar is in Birbhum. This hypothesis that Chāndo migrated from Bihar to Rāṅgāmātī is supported by M.N. Chakravarty,<sup>2</sup> who adds that there is a big marsh known as Golābārī near the villages Gure and Pasla in Murshidabad, which is believed to have been the anchorage of Chāndo's boats. There is a tank popularly known as Chāndsādāgarerdighī on the west bank of the marsh. The same scholar asserts that this traditional Chāndo must be the legendary hero of the Manasāekāvyas. A further tradition<sup>3</sup> tells that there was a King named Basanta Kedār in Bhagalpur and his Capital was Champāinagar. Chāndo annexed

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1. Nikhilnath Ray, op.cit., p.87.

2. M.N.Chakravarty, (Ed.) Birbhum Vivarana, pp.132-134.

3. Srī Srī Padmapurāṇa o Baiśkavi Manasaṃgaṇa, Intro., p.6.

his country and began to rule there. This tradition seems to depend on that previously mentioned, which put Chāndo's conquest of Champā before his migration to Murshidabad.

At the beginning of his discussion of the subject D.C. Sen<sup>1</sup> is inclined to doubt that Champakanagar, which is referred to as the birthplace of Chāndo, is identical with Champā of the Āṅga country, but later he seems to change his mind. He puts forward the following points in favour of the identification:

(1) According to textual evidence one of <sup>the</sup> early poets of Manasā-Kāvya, Nārāyaṇ Deb, was born in Magadha.

(2) In one manuscript copy of the version of Nārāyaṇ Deb it is once stated that Sanakā was the daughter of a King of Bihar and it is said in the version of Baṃśīdās that Sanakā was a princess of Pāṭalinagar which, according to Sen, is identical with the historic Pāṭaliputra.

(3) On the basis of the textual evidence it is stated that the pot of Manasā was first worshipped by a King of Bihar, named Bachāi, a member of the farming class.<sup>2</sup>

Finally, Sen suggests<sup>3</sup> that the early form of the story had its birth in Bihar but the legend grew to maturity in

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1. Sen, Vaṅga Sāhitya-Parichaya, Part 1, p.172. This view has been first expressed in the Bengali journal Aryavartta (Jyāishṭha issue), B.S.1319.

2. Infra, pp. 276-280.

3. Sen, Vaṅga Sāhitya Parichaya, Part 1, p.173.

Bengal, especially in East Bengal.

A. Bhattacharya<sup>1</sup> supports the case for Bihar for the following reasons:

(1) The story found in the Bihari texts is free from Purāṇic myths and legends, whereas every Bengali version contains many such stories. The simple character of the Bihari legend suggests to Bhattacharya that it was imported into Bengal from Bihar.

(2) There is a similarity between the form of worship described in the Bihari version and the present practice in the district of Birbhum. In the Bihari version Manasā always appears with her four sisters. Such a belief is still current in Birbhum, where the goddess is worshipped in the form of five or seven earthen pots which are believed to be the symbolic representations of the sisters.

(3) The reference to a river named Bihāriyā<sup>2</sup> and the use of other similar names in the Bengali versions is interpreted to mean that the river and the places named are in Bihar.

Before reaching a final conclusion on the claim of Bihar Bhattacharya gives some consideration to a few points which oppose it. His final opinion, however, is in favour

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1. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp.203-208.

2. Nārāyan Deb, op.cit., p.195.

of the theories already mentioned, that the story originated in Bihar and later migrated to Bengal. He argues that the story was orally current in Bihar in a very simple form as folk poetry and that after it had been carried into Bengal it achieved its present literary form at the hands of poets. It is interesting to note, however, that in a recent article he seems to have changed his mind in favour of the claim of Bengal as the early home of the legend.<sup>1</sup>

Biraj Kanti Ghose<sup>2</sup> was the first to criticise the arguments in favour of Bihar put forward by D.C.Sen. He located Magadha and Behār or Bihāriyā, as referred to in the Bengali versions, in Sylhet and Cooch Behar respectively. As regards the worship of Manasā by the former King Bachāi of Bihar, he remarks that he has not been able to find any textual evidence for this in any version and adds that Manasā worship was not current in Bihar at the time of writing. He categorically rejects the claim that Bihar was the early home of the legend and the cult and that Magadha was the birthplace of Nārāyan Deb.

A.Bhattacharya, however, rejects this identification of Magadha. He advanced an extraordinary hypothesis which

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1. Folklore, Vol.II, No.3, 1961, pp.171-172.

2. S.P.P.R., Vol.VII, No.2, B.S.1319, pp.66-76.



he bases on a line in Nārāyaṇ Deb's version, namely that the word magadha is not a place name at all but a synonym of mugdha, foolish.<sup>1</sup> Comment on this suggestion is unnecessary, beyond the remark that the confusion of these two words might be due to a textual error. There is no linguistic evidence that magadha and mugdha are variants of the same word.

### SOUTH INDIA

Professor K.M.Sen<sup>2</sup> has taken a quite different line. He is of the opinion that the evidence points to South India as the birth-place of Manasā worship and of the legend which constitutes the main part of the Manasā-Kāvya.

(1) He rejects outright the opinion of other scholars that Chāndo was a Bengali, because a number of places in Bengal claim the site of his residence as theirs. He regards this argument as valid. With regard to Behulā too he maintains that she is not a Bengali woman but of South Indian origin. He lists certain features which, he alleges, are to be expected in a woman from South India, but which are incompatible with the general character of the Bengali woman. He makes particular play with the argument that

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1. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., p.227 (footnote)

2. Pravāsi, Āshāḍha issue, B.S. 1329, pp.384-395.

Behulā showed heroic qualities, whereas Bengali women are timid and easily frightened. Behulā, according to all versions, was bold and daring in every action and phase of her life. Her carrying the dead body of her husband on a raft before the gods and goddesses, her performance of a dance before Siva, her appearance in the guise of a Dom girl before her mother-in-law and the tricks which she played at that time, and her appearance with her husband in the guise of a yogi couple before her mother, led the scholar to suggest that the story, or part of it, emanated from South India. He also makes the point that the practice of pleasing the gods by a dance is not typically Bengali but is characteristic of the Telugu country. This latter point is supported by A. Bhattacharya<sup>1</sup> and N.R. Ray<sup>2</sup> who believe that the characterisation of Behulā as a dancer was of South Indian origin.

(2) He also refers to a story of a village goddess Ammavaru, now worshipped as Ankamma, current in South India. The story associated with Ammavaru, is, he claims, similar to the principal story of Manasā. On this similarity, he builds a theory that the Manasā story in question, had their origin in South India. The story runs thus.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., p.203.

2. N.R. Ray, op.cit., p.766.

3. H. Whitehead, The Village Gods of South India, pp.126-137.

Ammavaru was born before the existence of four yugas, and she laid three eggs. Two of them were spoilt and out of the third Brahmā, Vishnu and Siva came into existence. She built three palaces for these in three domains. She also built one for herself. Time passed, until one day she learnt that her three sons were neglecting her worship and had began to seek worship on their own account. Siva grew so arrogant that he even began to insult her and finally sent an attendant to her domain to abuse her. The goddess became very angry and resolved to destroy the domain of Siva.

She dressed and adorned herself and took "a deer in one hand, a conch in the other and a small drum in a third and put a snake round her body as a sacred thread". She summoned a council of her subjects, and explained that she was being humiliated by Siva. Riding on a jackal she proceeded towards the domain of Siva at Davagiri. Besides other measures against Siva, she engaged her sister "to keep people off the road and then placed her sisters, the hundred Saktis, to keep watch and also a twelve-headed snake which coiled its body all round the town, keeping its hooded heads just opposite the gate and emitting poisonous fumes from its mouths." After taking these measures she attacked her three sons and their followers. All were

defeated and their heads, together with those of seven other kings, were cut off. Finally, Ammavaru brought them back to life and left the place when they began to worship her.

A year later nine of her devotees left her and started worshipping Siva. This aroused great anger in Ammavaru, who visited the town of Devagiri in the guise of an old woman carrying a basket containing fruits and herbs. The watchman refused her admission on the ground that none were allowed to enter except devotees of Siva. Then she made him fall asleep by her magical power and entered the town, where she found ~~an~~ hordes of people on all sides. She tried to sell fruits to them but she was interrupted by the watchman, who beat her and drove her out. At this the goddess threw her basket on the ground, which immediately caused an earthquake.

Next she transformed herself into a Lingāyat and appeared before the watchman at the gate. When she was about to enter, she was asked whence she had come. She told a suitable story and finally managed to enter the town. Then she assumed the guise of a parrot and sat on a pillar inside the temple enclosure. Nine devotees, each with an emblem in his hand, were worshipping Siva; they felt so

much heat in those emblems (the nature of which is not specified) that they let them drop and began to shout, "O Siva, your temple is about to burn, so set us free that we may reach our houses; we have had enough of you; now there is no use in worshipping you." At this Siva was distressed and enquired of the watchman whether any outsider had entered the town. They replied that only a *hīṅgāyat* woman had entered.

Ammavaru was arrested. In order to punish her, she was tied to a red hot pillar, but it at once became cold. Next the nine devotees tried to beat her, but they were powerless to raise their hands. Other obstacles were overcome by her magical powers. She angrily told Siva that he had failed to recognise her, and asked the devotees whether they would worship her or not. They replied, "O Ammavaru, we will not worship a female deity, as we never think of her existence and we do not know any other name except 'Līṅga-Nama-Sivāya'". Siva was very pleased at this.

Ammavaru took up the challenge and spread an epidemic of smallpox throughout the domain of Siva. This caused many deaths, but Siva brought many of the corpses back to life, and left only a few to their fate.

She then took another course to punish the devotees of Siva. She appeared in the city in the guise of an old

flower-woman and sold flowers to the kings, who were strict devotees of Siva, for their weight, in gold. In this way she impoverished the land. At this the kings, who had been engaged in prayers when Ammavaru came to sell flowers, made a vindictive plan to steal flowers from her garden. But fortune did not favour them; they were seized by Ammavaru, who took revenge for her defeat at the hands of Siva by killing them.

This quarrel between the worshippers of Siva, supported by the god himself, and Ammavaru is, according to Professor K. M. Sen, similar to the quarrel between Siva and Manasā in the Manasā-kāvyas.

(3) K.M. Sen's next point concerns the origin of the name of Manasā. He mentions a Dravidian goddess whose name is Mane-Māñchī or Mañchāmmā and states that he has personal experience of the worship of her in the Telugu and Canarese areas of South India. He states that the people worship snakes at the shrine of Mane-Māñchī or Mañchāmmā, which contains a hole resembling the hole of a snake in an ant-hill. The worshippers believe that this hole is the residence of the snake who bears the name Mane-Māñchī or Mañchāmmā. The hole is opened once a year and offerings are made, chiefly by men. The people also

call the goddess Nāgamātā, Mañchā-Ammā or Mañchā-Mātā. Whitehead also mentions this goddess and gives some details of ritual practices connected with her.<sup>1</sup> K.M. Sen continues that the correct form of the name of the goddess is Mañchā but its phonetic realisation is often Mansā, and as a result of this the orthographic form of the name has been changed to Mansā-Ammā or Mansā-Mātā. Finally, he states that thus the South Indian Mansā-Mātā became Mansā or Manasā in Bengal. This view is supported by Bhattasālī,<sup>2</sup> Ray,<sup>3</sup> Ghose<sup>4</sup> and Swami Sankarananda.<sup>5</sup>

(4) K.M. Sen refers to a word chemmuri which occurs along with kāñī as chemmuri-kāñī in some versions of the poem as one of the epithets of Manasā. According to him the word has no meaning in Bengali and he suggests that it had its origin in South India, where in modern Telugu Chemmuru or jemuru is the name of the tree which in Sanskrit is snuhī. This tree, which has curative qualities for a variety of diseases, is mentioned in Bhāva-Prakāśa,<sup>6</sup> a work

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1. Whitehead, op.cit., pp. 85-87.

2. Bhattasālī, op.cit., p. 221.

3. N.R.Ray, op.cit., p. 766.

4. M.Ghose, op.cit., p. 69.

5. Sankarananda, op.cit., pp. 7-8, 13-14, 111f.

6. Bhava Misra: Bhāva Prakāśa, (Ed. by) Kaviraj Russick Lal Gupta, Part 1, p. 229. Prof. K.M. Sen refers to the Kalutolā edition of this text where the Telugu equivalent of the snuhī tree is given. Unfortunately we have not been able to consult this edition. The text edited by Gupta does not contain the Telugu equivalent.

on Hindu medicine where the Bengali equivalent of the snuhī tree is given as siḥ or manasā and the Telugu as chemmuru. He uses this apparent identification as an additional argument in support of his claim that the Manasā legend and cult are of South Indian origin.

(5) He also draws attention to similarities in the snake cult and the manner of snake worship in Malabar and Bengal. People of both the places draw ālpanā, designs, as part of their worship of snakes. As in Bengal, on the Malabar coast the pūjārī or officiating priest draws "a geometrical design of a snake on the floor. The animal is represented in rice flour. And the spaces between the coils are filled with burnt rice husk, tumeric powder, powdered green leaves, etc."<sup>1</sup> Other similarities between Bengal and Malabar claimed by Sen are the beliefs that Snake-doctors or ojhās have the power of nullifying the effects of poison by uttering mantras and performing certain rites, and of forcing a snake to suck out the poison from its bite. Moreover, he alleges, snake groves are found in every Hindu house on the coast of Malabar.<sup>2</sup> These he compares with the Manasā-kholā or Manasā-tolā in Bengal which is the name given to certain places where Manasā is

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1. E. Thurston, Ethnographic Notes in South India, pp. 290f.  
 2. Ibid., pp. 285-287.



worshipped and is similar to the snake grove in Malabar.

(6) He also enumerates certain similarities between Bengali and South Indian dress and also between certain musical instruments used in both areas.

On these grounds K.M.Sen argues that the story and the cult of Manasā were imported into Bengal from South India.

He makes a further point on historical grounds. He draws attention to the known fact that the Senas of Bengal came from South India and suggests that they brought the worship of various deities with them. He explains the fact that none of the texts refer to any connection, between the Sena kings and Manasā worship by suggesting that when the Kāvyas came to be written the connection between the Senas and Manasā had been forgotten. This theory of K.M. Sen is supported by N.K. Bhattasali,<sup>1</sup> P.L.Paul<sup>2</sup>, N.R.Ray<sup>3</sup> and M.Ghose<sup>4</sup>. Bhattasali attempts to confirm it by stating explicitly that the worship of the snake goddess Mane-Māñchī or Mañchāmmā who "first became Manasā at the hands of the Brahman theologians", came into Bengal at the

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1. Bhattasali, op.cit., p.224.

2. Paul, The Early History of Bengal, Vol. II, p.106.

3. N.R.Ray, op.cit., p.589.

4. M.Ghose, op.cit., p.69.

time of the migration of the Senas. He believes that the Senas favoured the goddess, so that it did not take long for her to become accepted in Bengal.

The South Indian theory is objected to by other scholars. Each of them criticises one or more of the points put forward by Sen and his supporters.

H.K.Mukhopadhyay<sup>1</sup> criticises K.M. Sen on the following grounds.

(1) Sen's theory that Chāndo was not an inhabitant of Bengal is pure speculation and totally unsupported by any evidence.

(2) Behulā's courage is <sup>not</sup> incompatible with the general character of the Bengali woman. Without giving specific references he states that in Sanskrit literature farmer's wives are referred to as guarding their fields and singing. He also states that other brave and active female characters are found in works in early Bengali literature. The latter contention he supports by reference to the Chandīmaṅgal-Kāvyas.

(3) He makes the point that the suggested origin of the name Manasā from Mane-Māñchī or Mañchāmmā may not be impossible, but he is of the opinion that the reverse is also arguable.

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1. Pravāsī, Bhādra issue, B.S.1329, p.733.

Other scholars also have discussed K.M.Sen's views.

(1) S.Sen states that "there is not the slightest reason to take it [the word Manasā] as a borrowing from Dravidian."<sup>1</sup> He points out that (i) Manasa was a name of a rishi<sup>2</sup> (ii) Manasā was the name of a celestial nymph<sup>3</sup> as well as a deity of snakes in the Buddhist pantheon<sup>4</sup> (iii) the word manasā-devī is used as an illustration of an aphonism in Chandragomin's grammar<sup>5</sup> and (iv) Mahāmanas is an epithet of Indra.<sup>6</sup> He points out that these words have been known from an early period in our history, and consequently there is no reason to suppose that the word Manasā has any other origin. He believes that the word Manasā originated from manas (mind) which is in turn derived from the root man (think).

(2) A.Bhattacharya<sup>7</sup> criticises the view that the goddess Mañichāmmā came to Bengal with the Senas and later became known as Manasā, on the ground that the Senas were

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1. Bipradās, op.cit., Intro. p.XXX

2. Rig-Veda, V.44.10;

3. Bipradās, op.cit., Intro.p.XXX; M.Williams in his Dictionary refers to Manasa as the name of a "Kiṃ-nari".

4. Gilgit Manuscripts, (Ed. by) N.Dutt and S.N.Sastri, Vol.III, Part I, pp.287-288.

5. Chandragomin: Chandra-Vṛitti, (Ed.by) Bruno Liebich, p.351; Chandragomin's date has been assigned in the period between 465 and 544 A.D. (History of Bengal, Vol.1, p.297).

6. Rig-Veda, X.103.9

7. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp.186-187, 211.

orthodox Brahmanas who would not therefore favour a local goddess like Mañchāmmā. Moreover, in the Canarese country neither has the goddess Manee-Māñchī or Mañchāmmā ever been worshipped by upper classes, nor has her cult been widely followed in an organised way. So the patronage of the goddess by the Senas is, according to him, out of the question. If there is any truth in the view that the word Manasā was derived from Mañchāmmā, Bhattacharya suggests that it was imported not by the Senas but by the Bengali snake charmers who roamed about in different parts of India.

(3) To the argument that there is a relationship between the stories of Ammavaru and of Manasā Bhattacharya<sup>1</sup> objects on the ground that evidence is not lacking of similar quarrels between the Brahmanical and popular deities in other Indian regional literatures of the mediaeval period. This similarity, therefore, is not peculiar to the Manasā-kāvya and too much stress should not be placed on it, particularly in view of the very substantiated difference in other respects between the stories of Ammavaru and those of Manasā.

(4) S.Sen<sup>2</sup> rejects the view that the word Chemmurī or

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1. Ibid., p.211

2. Bipradās, op.cit., Intro. pp.XXXIIIIf.

Chengamurī is of Dravidian origin for two reasons: Firstly, the absence of the word Chengamurī-Kānī or Chemmurī-Kānī in the early version of Bipradās leads him to think that "the word is of purely of Bengali origin". Secondly, similar words are not uncommon in Bengal. He explains the term Chengamurī-Kānī or Cemmurī-kānī in two ways: (i) He points out that Chēnga means bamboo, mur, to wrap, and kānī, a rag or torn cloth. So the compound word means, "a bamboo wrapped with rag". He also points that these words may have some association with a dead body carried, suspended from a bamboo pole. (ii) He suggests alternatively that Chēnga may mean a young lad, and mur to destroy. Thus the meaning of the compound word is "destroyer of young men" which he claims is in accord with Manasā's campaign against Chāndo.

#### RĀDHA or WEST BENGAL

The points which favour the claim of West Bengal, or Rāḍha, have been put forward by D.C.Sen, A.Bhattacharya, T.W.Clark, Benoy Ghosh and others.

It has been noted above that D.C.Sen argues in favour of Bihar as the early home of the legend. Elsewhere he argues in favour of Bengal. This inconsistency is not resolved by Sen himself in a final conclusion. It can,

however, be to some extent resolved on a historico-geographical basis, as will be shown later. Sen's argument in favour of Bengal is as follows.

He writes: "The song of Behulā ... is still sung in Bhagulpur [in Bihar] and the adjacent districts of Western India .... There can be no doubt that the original home of these songs was Bengal. In the Hindi version too we find description of Chānd, the merchant king of Champā, of Behulā, the daughter of Sāha the merchant, and of Sanakā, the queen of Chānd. That these songs were imported from Bengal is not only indicated by the localities of the incidents described in the poems, but also by the fact that the Hindi poems, themselves were frequently required to be sung 'in Bāngāl Rāga' or the tune of prevalent in Bengal. There is also a frequent mention in these poems of that favourite tune of the Bengali rustics, the Bhāṭiyāl Rāg, with which our village people are so familiar .... These songs of Bengal must have travelled to distant countries in their comparatively earlier stages and they bear a greater affinity to the earliest poems of Bengal than to the later ones. I have found one passage in the Hindi version in which the description of Manasā Devī's ornaments tallies almost exactly with that found in

the poem of Hari Datta, the earliest known Bengali poet of the Manasā cult."<sup>1</sup>

Thus D.C.Sen's view is based mainly on the grounds that (i) the localities of the incidents described in the Hindi versions have been identified with places in Bengal and (ii) the directions given in those versions that the poems are to be sung in Bāṅgāl rāg<sup>2</sup> and Bhāṭiyāl rāg current in Bengal.

A.Bhattacharya elaborates the first point of D.C.Sen and adds further arguments in favour of the claims of Bengal.<sup>3</sup> He argues as follows:

(1) The reference to Mayanānagar<sup>4</sup> where Behulā recovered her husband, suggests that the story had its origin in Rādhā as Mayananagar or Maynapur is a village in Bankura. It was a place where people used to perform tapas in order that their desires might be fulfilled. Moreover, he feels that the reference to Trivenī<sup>5</sup> in Hooghly district in the same version is also in favour of this claim.

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1. Sen, Vaṅga Sāhitya Parichaya, Part.1, Intro. pp.19-20.

2. Bihulā-Vishaharī, p.39.

3. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp.208-209, 212-213, 216.

4. Bihulā-Vishaharī, pp.28-29.

5. Ibid., pp.10, 13, 14, 15, 44.

(2) Bhattacharya states that the Bihari versions are for the most part written in Bhojpuri dialect but that the presence of Bengali forms<sup>1</sup> is a proof that the poems were composed in Bengali and later translated into Bhojpuri.

(3) He draws attention to the fact that the Santal ojhās in the district of Santal Parganas use mantras against snake bite which are in Bengali. These ojhās also worship Manasā and include her name in their list of deities.

(4) He alleges that many of the great poets of the Manasā-kāvyas state in their kāvyas that they themselves migrated from Rāḍha to East Bengal. After the Muslim invasion of West Bengal many upper class Hindus migrated to East Bengal in order to live in peace under the independent Hindu Kings who ruled there for 150 years after the invasion.<sup>2</sup> Among those migrants were many poets of Manasā-kāvya who introduced the legend of Manasā among the people of the different areas of East Bengal. He quotes two lines from the version of Nāvāyan Deb:

"My ancestors were very pure in their hearts. We migrated from Rāḍha to Borgrām." From these two lines he

1. Behulā-Vishaharī, pp.23f.

2. The Senas ruled in east Bengal roughly a hundred years (History of Bengal, Vol.1, p.288).



assumes that Nāvāyan Deb himself migrated from Rāḍha to Borgrām in Mymensingh, where he spread the legend and the cult.

(5) Bhattacharya further draws our attention to the version of the eastern poet Bijay Gupta, where references are found to many beliefs and practices current in Rāḍha. As the family of Nārāyan Deb migrated from Rāḍha to East Bengal, some traces of the influence of Rāḍha might be expected in his poem. But there could be no such expectation in the case of Bijay Gupta, who appears to have been indigenous to east Bengal. A careful study of his version shows, according to Bhattacharya, many beliefs and practices current only in Rāḍha. Among those the birth story of Neto,<sup>1</sup> the reference to rāibānsīyā pāeks,<sup>2</sup> the use of gāmāxiyā pūri<sup>3</sup> and the white crow<sup>4</sup> receive special mention.

(a) The story of the birth of Neto was, Bhattacharya affirms, derived from Dharma literature, where a similar account of the birth of the primordial energy occurs. It is to be remembered that Dharma literature and the cult it describes had their origin in Rāḍha and are confined to that area.

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1. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., pp.48-49.

2. Ibid., p.172.

3. We have not been able to find out any reference to the text edited by Basanta Kumar Bhattacharya.

4. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., pp.213,214.

(b) The nāibāniśiyā pāeks, or attendants bearing bamboo staves, existed only in Rāḍha and nowhere else.

(c) The texts contain references to the use of gāmāniyā pūris or wooden seats, such a seat is used as the throne of the god Dharma in Rāḍha. In east Bengal the use of this kind of seat is unknown.

(d) The reference to the white crow as the messenger of Behulā to her mother also indicates the influence of Rāḍha, where a white crow is believed to be the door keeper of the god Dharma.

Besides these connections with the Dharma cult he further points out that the influence of the Dharma cult on the work of Bijay Gupta is revealed in the statement that Behulā at the time of her journey with the corpse of her husband, spent days without food by the grace of Dharma.<sup>1</sup> Herein may be seen a reference to the practice of austerity by members of the Dharma cult in Rāḍha.

(5) Bhattacharya also notes that Birbhum is the only place in Bengal where Manasā is widely worshipped today ... Moreover the early popularity of the cult there is indicated by the discovery of a number of ancient Manasā images in this district.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., pp.216,217,218.

2. For the identity of the images in question see Chapter VII.

Bhattacharya concludes from the above evidence that the story was fully developed in Rāḍha,<sup>1</sup> and in Birbhum in particular,<sup>2</sup> and thence it migrated into east Bengal.<sup>3</sup>

T.W. Clark <sup>supports</sup> ~~points out~~ the claim of West Bengal as the early home of the cult for two reasons - "first, the only place where Manasā worship is reported to be regularly celebrated today with rites similar to those outlined in the poems, is the area round Burdwan ... and, second, some of the poets of eastern Kāvya state that their families originally lived in West Bengal, and were later for political reasons compelled to migrate. It may on these grounds be held, even if only tentatively, that the Manasā cult was born in West Bengal, and that when it spread to the rivers and was accepted by the people who sailed both them and the Bay of Bengal, it was carried to the eastern and north eastern districts, and possibly also to Assam."<sup>4</sup>

A few place names referred to in the Manasā-kāvya or Chandīkāvya have been identified by a group of scholars with places which once existed or still exist in Rāḍha.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., p.213.

2. Ibid., p.216.

3. Ibid.

4. B.S.O.A.S., Vol.XVII/3, pp.509-510.

5. S.P.P., Vol.XX, B.S.1320, pp.161-175; A.C.Gupta, Hooghly Bā Dakshin Rāḍha, Part.1, p.75; N.N.Vasu, (Ed.), Bardhamāner Itikathā, pp.14, 22; B.Ghose, Paśchimāṅger Samskriti, pp.264-278.

Ujāni or Ujānīnagar, the birth place of Behulā and of Dhanapati of the Chandīkāvya has been identified with the area which once included the villages Kogrām (popularly known as Kogān), Maṅgalkoṭ, Ārdol (Ārdwāl), Ichhānī and other adjoining villages in Burdwan. There is a reference in some of the poems to Nichhānī or Ichhānī as the birth place of Behulā. The village Ichhānī is situated a distance of two miles to the east of Ujāni, which included this village at the time of its prosperity.<sup>1</sup>

B.Ghose, strongly supports this view on the ground that the place Ujāni is referred to not only in Manasā-Kāvyas but also in contemporary literature including other Mangal-kāvyas. He continues that the frequent reference to Ujāni in mediaeval literature gives the impression that the place was famous in those days as an area inhabited by people of the merchant class. Champakānagar or Champāinagar, where Chāndo lived, is also situated in Burdwan. The close proximity of Ujāni and Champakanagar is clearly indicated from the narrative poems about Manasā and Chaṇḍī. Chāndo gave his son Lakhindar in marriage to Behulā, the daughter of the merchant Sāhe of Ujāni. This suggests that these two places were not far from each other. This can be supported from

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1. S.P.P., Vol.XX, B.S.1320, p.173.

the 16th century Chandi-kavyas of Makundarām<sup>1</sup> which gives a list of the names of merchants with their respective residences, including Chāndosadāgar of Champakanaga, Dhūsa Datta of Burdwan, Rāma Nya of Karjanā, Haridatta of Barasula and Rāma Kundu of Fatepur. All the above places, he concludes, are located in the districts of Burdwan and Hoogly. A careful study of the narrative poems written in honour of the local deities tells us that the area from Ujāni, Champakanaga and Karjana in Burdwan to Saptagram in Hoogly contained many prosperous members of the merchant class, who played a great role in the development of the cults of the local deities such as Dharma, Manasā and Chandi. It seems probable that one of the important centres of the evolution of the cult and the legend was Burdwan. Thus, according to B.Ghose, the legend of Behulā and Lakhindar had its origin in somewhere in Rāḍha.<sup>2</sup>

### Section B.

So far we have discussed the opinions of previous scholars. Now we analyse those points which deserve more detailed consideration, and add new points which seem feasible to us.

### BIHAR

(1) As already observed D.G.Sen claims that the King Bachāi of Bihar was a first worshipper of Manasā. It appears

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1. Mukundarām: Kavikaṅkan Chandi (Ed. by) Sen, Bandyopadhyaya and Basu, Part 11, pp.368-369.

2. B.Ghose, Paśchimbaṅger Saṁskṛiti, pp.264-278.

however, that Bachāi was not a historical figure. B.K. Ghose objects to the theory on the ground that he has failed to find any evidence in support of Sen's view in the texts. Our own research has also failed to find relevant textual evidence. The only reference to the place of residence of Bachāi is a statement by the 17th century poet Baṃśīdās that he lived between Nishad in the north and Kālañjar in the South.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately the location of these places has not been established. There is a reference to a place called Nishād in an inscription as being in the modern Madhya Pradesh.<sup>2</sup> But the Nishād of this inscription can hardly be the same place as Nishad referred to by Baṃśīdās. The capital of the Chamdella Kings was Kālañjara in Bundelkhand which can hardly be the kālañjar of Baṃśīdās. There is therefore no evidence to show that the Nishad and Kālañjar of Baṃśīdās were in Bihar. They might equally well be Bengal village names. In any case no argument can be based on their location, as that is not known.

(2) The absence of Purāṇic myths and legends in the Bihāri version, according to A. Bhattacharya, suggests that the story migrated to Bengal from Bihar. This argument seems unconvincing in view of the fact that we know so little

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1. Baṃśīdās, op.cit., p.120.

2. Epigraphica Indica, Vol. VIII, p.44.

of the origin of the different stories which are contained in the Manasā-kāvyas and that the Bihari version he refers to cannot in its present form be dated earlier than the late 19th century. It is relevant to note that the corpus of Bihari literature on the Manasā theme is negligible in comparison with the large number of texts which belong to Bengal.

(3) A. Bhattacharya's observation that there is a similarity between the Bihari version and the present practice of worship in Birbhum does not seem to be an argument in favour of the claim of Bihar. The worship of Manasā in the form of five or seven pots representing her five sisters has not been confirmed by our correspondants. The use of the five or seven pots in the Manasā worship can be explained otherwise. The use of the odd numbers of articles e.g. 3, 5, 7 in religious ceremonies or on auspicious domestic occasions is common <sup>in</sup> both Bengal and Bihar. The number five occurs in ritual, religious and other contexts particularly frequently in the versions of Bengal<sup>1</sup> and Bihar.<sup>2</sup> But the

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1. Bipradās, op.cit., pp. 84, 163; Nārāyan Deb, op.cit., pp. 38, 42, 45, 56, 57; Bamsīdās, op.cit., pp. 168, 189, 190, 195, 232, 267, 288, 302, 319, 465. References to the worship of Manasā in the form of five pots in a purely conventional manner are found in the versions of Nārāyan Deb (p. 241) and Bijay Gupta (p. 246).
  2. Bihulā-Vishahari, pp. 40, 45. The use of five objects in every auspicious ceremony of present day in Bihar has been reported to us by L.K.S. Mowar, Lecturer in English, Nalanda College, P.O. - Biharsharif, Patna.

numeral five is by no means confined to Manasā literature or to the worship of that goddess.<sup>1</sup> For instance the figure five occurs very frequently in legal documents in Nepal where deeds etc. are validated by the witness of "Śrī Pañcha Brahmanas" (five Brahmanas).<sup>2</sup> The traditional

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1. It is to be noted that the use of the numeral five is purely conventional from the early period of our history. A. Karim writes in connection to the study of Pāñch-Pīr that "an examination of both Hindu and Muslim religious practices shows that the numeral five is important to both Hindus and Muslims. The Hindus put importance to (a) the five chaste women, viz. Kauśalyā, Draupadī, Kuntī, Tārā and Mandudarī; (b) the Pañcavati i.e., the jungles of vatas where Rāma and Sita were exiled; (c) the five Pāṇḍava brothers and (d) the five rivers i.e. the five feeder rivers to the Indus. The Muslims also put importance to the numeral five in some respects, because they have to say their prayers five times a day, to recite five Kalimahs, and according to Islamic principles there are five pillars of Islam i.e. Imān (belief), Namāz (prayer), Roza (fasting), Hajj (pilgrimage to Makkah and Madinah) and Zakat (Poor-rate). The Buddhists had the conception of five Dhyāni Buddhas" (A. Karim, Social History of the Muslims in Bengal, p.169).
  2. For this information we are indebted to Mr. T.W. Clark.



village panchāyats consisting ideally of five local elders, are almost too well known to need mention. Thus the use of five or seven pots at the Manasā worship is inconclusive as an argument in favour of Bihar.

One point needs to be mentioned in connection with the Bihar case which other scholars do not appear to have noted. There is a peculiar practice among womenfolk of Bengal that they do not sleep in the bed with their hair untied. It is commonly believed that this practice had its origin in the story of Lakhindar who was bitten by a snake on the bridal night. Four mongooses, the enemies of snakes, were tied to the four legs on the bedstead to guard it against snakes. But when the couple were both fast asleep, the dishevelled hair of Behulā touched the ground. The snake succeeded finally in biting Lakhindar by creeping up her hair. This part of the episode does not occur in any of the Bengali versions. It is however found in one of the published Bihari version.<sup>1</sup> It is hard to decide how this piece of evidence should be assessed. The practice referred to is still current in Bengal, but it seems to be unknown, as far as our researches go, in Bihar. The omission of it from the Bengali poems is strange, but no stranger than the omission from all known

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1. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., p.206.

versions of the Manasā boat festival.<sup>1</sup> The only possible conclusion seems to be that no single Manasā poem contains all the stories which are popularly associated with her. The single reference to the braiding of the hair by Bengali brides in a Bihari version should not in our view be regarded as evidence in support of the Bihar claim.

#### SOUTH INDIA

(1) The argument that because many localities, some in Bihar and Assam, claim Chāndo he was therefore not a Bengali cannot be accepted. We have already stated that the claims of the different places to be the residence of Chāndo arise from the wide popularity of the legend and the cult and nothing more. The view that Behulā exhibits characteristics common to South Indian women but rare in Bengal has been objected to by H.K. Mukhopadhyaya. Moreover the argument that the practice of dancing to please the gods is of South Indian origin cannot be accepted at its face value. Ritual dancing was known in Bengal at a comparatively early period. The practice of dancing by the upper class people of Bengal can be well proved from the terracotta figurines of the Pāla-Sena period found in Paharpur and Mayanamatā, and from the contemporary inscriptions,

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1. Infra, pp. 489 - 492.

where there are references to dancing gods and goddesses, Apsarās, Gandharvas, temple dancers and so on.<sup>1</sup> It is to be noted further that, before the characterisation of Behulā as a dancer, religious dancing seems to have been well established in Bengali society, as we are told by tradition<sup>2</sup> that Padmāvati, the wife of the 12th century poet Jayadeva, used to dance when her husband sang the songs of Gīta-Govinda. Thus it would seem that the presentation of Behulā as a dancer cannot be used as an argument in support of the South Indian origin of the Manasā legend and the cult. In any case it does not necessarily follow that this feature of the story is due to the direct influence of South Indian practice.

(2) The view that the story of Manasā had its origin in the story of Ammavaru current in South India is objected to by A. Bhattacharya, whose arguments have already been expressed. This point needs further discussion. In the Ammavaru story there is a quarrel between the worshippers of Siva, supported by the god himself, and Ammavaru, the folk goddess, who took active steps to spread her cult among the former. This reminds us of Chāndo's struggle with Manasā, who like Ammavaru, determined to spread her cult

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1. N.R. Ray, op.cit., p.770.

2. Ibid., B.Ghose, Paśchimbāṅger Saṁskṛiti, p.144.

and especially to convert Chāndo, who was a devotee of Siva. When Ammavaru created general havoc, Siva brought back the lives of many of his followers but left a few to their fate. In the case of Chāndo we find Siva behaving in much the same way and remaining inert, When his devotee suffered after the loss of his mahājñāna. The ultimate fate of the devotees of Siva was decided by submission in the case of Chāndo, and by destruction in the case of the nine kings.

Similar analogies, however, can be well drawn also in the cases of Dhanapati in the 16th century Bengali Chandīkāvya and of King Chandraketu in the 18th century Sitalā kāvya. Prof. K.M. Sen's argument from the similarities between the stories relating to Manasā and Ammavaru is not sufficient to prove that the story of Manasā had its origin in South India and was later imported into Bengal. It would be equally valid to argue that the legends of the Chandī kāvya and the Sitalākāvya also had their origin in South India. Moreover, the special function of Ammavaru is not mentioned in the story, and no reference is made to her as being a snake goddess.<sup>1</sup> Again there is no evidence

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1. Ammavaru's only association with snakes is that she wears one on her shoulder as a vajñopavita and employs one to help destroy her enemies. On this basis Bhattasali thinks that she is especially connected with snakes (Bhattasali, op.cit., p.221). This is very slender evidence and if it were pressed it would be possible to argue that Siva also is a snake divinity, as he too wears snakes as his vajñopavita.

that this story is older than the story of Manasā. Sen makes no attempt to date the Ammavaru story. So in this respect Prof. Sen's interpretation cannot stand.

(3) In contesting the derivation of the word Manasā from the South Indian goddess Mane-māñchī or Mañchāmmā, S. Sen suggests other sources, already referred to, from which the name might have been derived. He makes references to certain words which appear in Indian literature prior to the period in which the cult of the goddess Manasā emerged. Included in these references is one to a Buddhist source of the 6th century A.D. which Sen quotes only in part.<sup>1</sup> The whole is as follows:

"Hail Buddha. Hail Dharma. Hail Saṅgha.  
Thus it is: "(O Goddess) who are pure, blameless, devoid of impurities, auspicious, of golden complexion, the female energy of the Golden Egg, good, very good; who art characterised by all round goodness, marked by prosperity; who art a means to achieve all objects, an instrument to the realisation of the Ultimate End, a pacifier of all evils and a means to bring about all kinds of goodness, Manasā, broadminded, unshaken, wonderful, most wonderful, free, the releaser, the liberator, devoid of the rajas

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1. Bipradā; op.cit., Intro. XXX.

element (full of) nector, immortal, divine, manifesting  
thysself as the sound of Brahma, perfect; who fulfils all  
kinds of desires, liberated, living, protect svāti from  
all calamities, fears and diseases. I salute you."<sup>1</sup>

The relevent word in this passage is unquestionably 'Manasā'.  
It is said that the above incantation known as the Mayūrīvidyā  
was taught by Buddha to his disciples when one of his newly  
ordained monks named Svāti had been bitten by a snake and  
could not be cured in any other way. After learning it the  
disciples uttered it in the presence of Svātī, who was cured.<sup>2</sup>  
Thus the existence of a snake goddess, Manasā by name,  
among the Buddhists is known from the above incantation.

It is to be noted, however, that the word manasā occurs  
only once in the middle of a long series of epithets. If  
this were the usual name of a Buddhist goddess, one would  
expect it either at the beginning or at the end of the series.  
It was probably not intended as a proper name, but merely as  
implying "consisting of mind", "born of the mind (of the

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1. Gilgit Manuscripts, Vol.III, Part.I, p.287.

" namo buddhāya namo dharmāya namah saṅghāya  
tadyatha amale vimale nirmale maṅgale hiranye hiranyagarbhe  
bhadre subhadre samantabhadre śrībhadre sarvārthasādhani  
paramārthasādhani sarvānarthaprasāmani sarvamaṅgalasādhuni  
manase mahāmānase achute adbhute atyadbhute mukte mochani  
mokshani. araje viraja amṛite amare (amarani) brahme brah-  
masvare pūrṇe pūrṇamanorathe mukte jīvate raksha svātim  
sarvopadravabhayarogebyaḥ svāhā".

2. Gilgit Manuscripts, Vol.III, Part I, Intro., p.37.

heavenly Buddha)" or "possessing an excellent mind". If such were the meaning the form Mānasā would be strictly correct, but as the text is derived from a single manuscript and as Buddhist Sanskrit contain many irregularities, this objection is not conclusive. Moreover, though the incantation is given as a remedy against snake bite, there is no evidence that the divinity to whom it was addressed was chiefly connected with snakes.<sup>1</sup>

There is however reference to a goddess named Manasā in the text of Rājamārtanḍa, which has been ascribed to King Bhoja and dated between 1040-1060 A.D.<sup>2</sup> It does not appear that any of the authorities mentioned<sup>3</sup> are aware of the existence of this text, as none of them has made reference to it. The relevant passage refers to a tithi in which a goddess named Manasā was worshipped. There is, however, no specific reference to snake worship<sup>4</sup> and therefore there are no grounds for supposing that this Manasā is the same as the goddess of the Maṅgalakāvyas.

Thus it may be concluded that the name Manasā was known in Sanskrit literature before the period in which it

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1. For this interpretation we are indebted to Mr.T.W.Clark.

2. A.B.O.R.I., Vol. XXXVI, p.306.

3. P.V.Kane who has not appeared in our discussion points to the text of Rājamartanḍa in connection to the Manasā worship (Kane, History of Dharmaśāstra, Vol.V.Part 1,p.125)

4. A.B.O.R.I., Vol. XXXVI, p.316.

was applied to our snake goddess. Nevertheless we are still not sure of the origin of the name.

The name Manasā occurs more frequently than any of the other names or epithets of the goddess in the early version of Bipradās and today also this name enjoys more popularity than others. S.Sen's explanation of its origin from manas (mind) is possible, but far from certain. It is curious that he does not cite the textual reference which seems to support his theory, the couplet in Bipradās's text: "She ( the goddess) is known as Manasā kumārī on account of her origin from the manas (mind) of Tripurāri (Śiva)".<sup>1</sup> This gloss however is by no means to be taken as a definite confirmation of Sen's derivation of the word. It is noteworthy that no other texts contain such a gloss and it is possible therefore that it is an argument a posteriori.

Similar glosses are to be found in the Brahmavaivarta and Devī-Bhāgavata purānas.<sup>2</sup> The insertions of these explanations in the Purānic texts give rise to the thought that the authors were attempting to stabilize the possession of the goddess Manasā in the orthodox Hindu pantheon by showing that her name was of Sanskrit origin and thus showing that she was a goddess of respectable standing.

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1. Bipradās, op.cit., p.3.

2. Brahmavaivarta Purāna, Prakṛiti Khanda, Adh.45,2-3;46,137ff; Devī-Bhāgavata, Navam Skandha (Section Nine), Adh.47,39-40; 48,135.



(4) The suggested origin of the word Chengamurī or Chemmurī from the Dravidians has been objected to by S.Sen, who has suggested possible sources of Bengali origin. But his interpretations are open to question. The word Kāni which appears along with Chengamurī or Chemmurī in modern Bengali has two meanings: "the one-eyed" and "a piece of cloth". In our texts kāni is always used with reference to Manasā and its meaning of "one-eyed" is supported by textual evidence.<sup>1</sup> It is surprising that S.Sen has arrived at the conclusion that the meaning "destroyer of young men" is suitable because "this also fits the activity of Manasā against Chāndo". There is no specific evidence in the texts that Manasā is a "destroyer of young men", her destruction of the snake doctor or doctors, the sons of Chāndo and the crew was a mere temporary expedient, and is not depicted as her regular function. Moreover, the young men in question were not permanently destroyed. We believe that S.Sen has discarded the simple and obvious meaning of this compound word.

The word Chengamurī Kāni or Chemmurī-Kāni is used as an abusive term and as such it may not have any very precise meaning. Cheng is the name of an ugly looking broad-headed fish generally not eaten by upper-class people. It is

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1. Supra, p. 126

traditionally famous for its cunning and there are number of local proverbs in some rural areas of Bengal regarding it. Muri is a noun meaning "head of a fish". So the meaning of the abusive term Chengamuri-kāni or Chemhuri-kāni literally can be "a one-eyed woman whose head looks like that of a Cheng-fish". The argument regarding the origin of this word from Dravidian is therefore not convincing, as an indigenous origin is at least as probable. In any case too much importance has been attached to this isolated word which, it must be repeated, is used only as an abusive epithet. Epithets of this character are liable to formal corruption and it is therefore not necessary to attach a precise connotation to this word or to speculate further on its origin.

(5) As regards the obvious similarities between Malabar and Bengal in the way of worship and other features of the snake cult, Prof. K.M. Sen has failed to notice that similar practices of drawing snake images with sandal paste on a wooden board or on the house wall on the Nāgapañchamī day are current in Gujarat<sup>1</sup>, the Konkan<sup>2</sup> and the Punjab.<sup>3</sup>

Reference must be made to the recruitment of Tamil dancers<sup>4</sup> and Telugu Soldiers<sup>5</sup> by Chāndo, which occur in some

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1. I.A., Vol.44, pp. 74f (Supplements)

2. Ibid., Vol.46, pp.138-139 (Supplements)

3. Ibid., Vol.38, p.126.

4. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., p.124.

5. Quoted from the version of Shashthibar by D.C.Sen, Vāṅga Sāhitya Parichaya, Part.1, p.252.

of the texts, the former when he set out on his first voyage and the latter when he went out to seek a bride for Lakhindar. K.M. Sen did not cite these passages to support his arguments in favour of the South Indian origin of the cult. It is doubtful in any case whether they could have been convincingly applied to any such purpose. References to Telugu soldiers and Tamil dancers are proverbial in Bengal. Such a proverbial tradition would seem to indicate frequency of contact between Bengal and the Southern parts of India, in an age when traders regularly sailed down the eastern coast of India this is not surprising. These facts however are insufficient to serve as the basis of a theory of the South Indian origin of Manasā.

In conclusion it is to be noted that, though the Manasā cult became so important in Bengal, Assam and Bihar it was never as far as is known, current in South India. There is not a single reference to Manasā or even to her alleged prototype Mane-Māñchī or Mañchāmmā in any South Indian text.<sup>1</sup> Of course Prof. K.M. Sen is right in suggesting that South India was in closer relations with Bengal than with any other

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1. P.V.Kane mentions in passing that Manasā is worshipped in the form of a snuhī tree on the fifth day of the dark half of Śrāvaṇa in South India (Kane, History of Dharmasāstra, Vol.V, Part.1,p.125). But he gives no reference for this statement and we have not been able to hear of this practice from any person from that area.

parts of northern India, and the two regions may have influenced each other in many respects. But if Manasā originated in the Dravida country it is very surprising that she is almost unheard of in Orissa,<sup>1</sup> which has always formed a bridge between the two regions, and has been influenced by both.

WEST BENGAL or RĀDHA

The points raised by A. Bhattacharya in support of the claim of West Bengal need discussion.

(1) Bhattacharya's identification of Maynānagar in the Bihari version with that of Maynānagar or Maynāpur is not acceptable. It is to be noted that there is now no village of the name Maynānagar in Bankura, though there is a village named Maynāpur in the same district which is still famous as a centre of the Dharma cult. The argument that Maynānagar and Maynāpur are one and the same place is surprising and open to criticism. The same scholar rejects the identification of these place names, elsewhere in the same book<sup>2</sup> in order to establish his own view; but when it suits his arguments, as it does here, he does not hesitate to assert that Maynānagar and Maynāpur are the same place. His arguments on this point seem to cancel one another out.

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1. Infra, pp. 473-475

2. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp. 593-594.

(2) He refers to the use of Bengali mantras by the Santal ojhās and implies without proof that this fact has a direct connection with the origin of the legend. He ignores, however, a fact which can be historically substantiated, that Bengali snake-charmers and the mantras they used enjoyed an all India reputation.<sup>1</sup> What then could be more likely than that the Santal ojhās borrowed the mantras which had already been made popular by the wandering Snake-charmers of Bengal.<sup>2</sup>

(3) Bhattacharya's view on the migration of the Mansā-māngal poets from west to east Bengal and the introduction of the legend by them are based on factual inaccuracies, though his conclusions are not necessarily wrong. We have not been able to find in any Bengali Manasākāvya of this period a statement that the poet himself migrated from Rāḍha to east Bengal, as Bhattacharya alleges. What is stated is that their families migrated.<sup>3</sup> The reason for the migration of the poets themselves as suggested by Bhattacharya seems unlikely, on

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1. Indian Folklore, Vol.1, No.2, 1956, pp.28-29.

2. Ibid.

3. (a) Quoted from the version of Nārāyaṇ Deb by A.Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., p.227.

(b) Bamśīdas, op.cit., p.13

(c) It is stated by Basanta Kumar Sengupta in his book "Chāndrapāṇi Datta" that among the Vaidayas who migrated from Rāḍha to other places at the time of the oppression of Vallālasena, included the ancestors of the poet Shashthibar (Quoted by Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., p.292).

the ground that none of the known poets of Manasāmaṅgal-kāvya can be assigned to a date earlier than the 15th century with the possible exception of Hari Datta, whose text is now no longer extant, and that the conquest of the whole of Bengal by the Muslims was completed in the early 14th century. So the theory of the migration of the poets themselves and the introduction of the legend among the people of east Bengal by those poets is obviously improbable.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, from the character of the texts, it is very probable that before the growth of the long narrative poems on Manasā, songs were composed and sung by the people to honour the deity on the day or days of her worship, and that these songs were handed down by oral tradition from generation to generation for a few centuries before the composition of longer poems in written form began.<sup>2</sup> Thus the legend was carried from Rādhā or West Bengal to other places either by the ancestors of the poets, as suggested by

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1. A. Bhattacharya is also inconsistent in his conclusions concerning the date of Nārāyaṇ Deb. He writes that Nārāyaṇ Deb migrated from Rādhā to the village Borgrām in Mymensingh in east Bengal (B.M.K.I., p.227). Then naturally the date of his poem falls in the early 13th century as it has been suggested that the migration took place during the Muslim invasion. But surprisingly enough the same author, after studying a traditional genealogical table of the family of Nārāyaṇ Deb, concludes in the next paragraph that the poet should be assigned to the latter part of the 15th century (B.M.K.I., p.229).
  2. D.C. Sen believes that the story of Behulā and Lakhindar had its origin in the 9th cent. and that it spread the whole of Northern India when Gauḍa was one of the important political centers

several scholars,<sup>1</sup> or by others.

It is clear therefore that the evidence produced hitherto is contradictory in respect of the origin of the Manasā cult and legend. Some scholars in fact have put forward different theories in different parts of their works. In the present study it has been possible to add to the material available to previous scholars. More is known as a result of the testimony of our informants about local traditions connected with Manasā worship and the claims put forward by various districts to be the original home of the principal legend. In spite of this additional information, however, it is still not possible to declare that the principal legend and the Manasā worship originated in a certain locality. It is however possible to argue that a certain wider district seems more likely to be the source of the origin of the legend and the cult.

### Section C.

Now we consider the arguments which in our opinion favour the claim of Rāḍha or West Bengal and add a few more.

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#### Footnote 2 continued from previous page

of North India under the Pālas (Sen, Brihat Baṅga, Part 1, pp. 467-468, 974).

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1. Supra, pp. 238f; S.Sen, History of Bengali Literature, p.103.

(1) The first point which draws our attention is that a few important places, apparently located in West Bengal, are referred to in the versions of the different poets including the published Bihari<sup>1</sup> and Assamese<sup>2</sup> versions of the ~~late 19th century and of the~~ early 20th century. ~~respectively.~~ Of these Champakanagar, Ujāni and Trivenī deserve special mention. Four villages named Champakanagar or Champāinagar, all locally believed to have been the residence of Chāndo, are found in Burdwan, Malda, Bhagalpur and Tripura.<sup>3</sup> The reference to Ujāni occurs in every version. It is observed by B.Ghose that both Ujāni and Champakanagar referred to in the mediaeval literature have been located in Burdwan which, according to him, was one of the early centres of the evolution of the cult. The remark of T.W. Clark in relation to Burdwan supports the claim of B.Ghose<sup>4</sup>. Local traditions are also to be considered in this connection. According to one of these there is a great stronghold of Manasā on the banks of the river Behulā, close to the village Champāinagar in Burdwan. On the Nāgapañchamī (a day of Manasā worship) the daughters-in-law of the villagers do not stay

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1. Chaupāinagar in the Bihari version seems to be the corruption of Champakanagar of the Bengali versions.

2. Phellaram Datta: Manasā Purāṇa, Jorahata, Assam, 1930.

3. Supra, pp. 211-213

4. Supra, pp. 238-240



in their fathers-in-laws' houses but go to those of their fathers. They leave the places reminding the bad fortune of Behulā on her bridal night. In their father's houses they observe a vow and send votive offerings to Manasā, at Champāinagar.<sup>1</sup> This practice is now neglected, as far as we can gather from our informants. Though there is no written evidence of it, we cannot altogether ignore it. Even today a fair of great importance locally believed to have been started a few centuries earlier, is held at Champāinagar where a great crowd gather together to worship the goddess and to pay respect to Behulā and Chāndo for their devotion and courage. The fair begins on the full moon day of Māgha and continues for fifteen days.<sup>2</sup>

A further tradition tells us that the local Gandhabaniks, the caste fellows of the principal legendary figures, refrain from digging the earth as it is believed by them that the snakes come out of their holes when one of the members of this caste digs. It is further said that a few years back a Gandhabanik died of snake bite while he was digging.<sup>3</sup>

Thus the claim of Champāinagar or Champakanagar in

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1. T. Bandopadhyaya, Nāginī Kanyār Kāhinī (a Bengali Novel), p.253.
  2. L.No.6 (Burdwan); Cf., Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp.215,216.
  3. L.No.6 (Burdwan); Cf. Ramgati Nayaratna, Bāṅglābhāṣā O Bāṅlāsāhitya Vishayak Prastāb, pp.119-120.

Burdwan to be the residence of Chāndo is reinforced by stronger traditions than are the similar claims put forward on behalf of places sharing the same name.

That Birbhum was one of the early centres of the evolution of the cult is suggested by its wide popularity there and from the special rites observed by the merchant classes of this district. Thus the Gandhabaniks engage parties, which sing songs of Manasā for two or three days before the celebration of a marriage.<sup>1</sup> In the same district a peculiar marriage rite is known as Gāchhabera<sup>2</sup> is observed by the Subarnabaniks, members of the merchant class. Only in the version of the 17th century poet Vishnu Pāl, whose manuscripts have all been collected from Birbhūm and West Burdwan, does there occur a reference to this peculiar marriage rite as part of Manasā worship.<sup>3</sup> In connection with the rite observed at the occasion of marriage, the songs of Vishnu Pāl are recited.

It can be assumed from the beliefs and from the rites observed by the merchant classes of Burdwan and Birbhum that the incident of the ill fortune of Behulā and Lakhindar and the sufferings of Chāndo must have been effectively

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1. B.D.G. (Burdwan), p.33.

2. Infra, pp. 429-432.

3. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., p.216; Bipradās, op.cit., Intro. p.XIII.

working on the minds of the people of this caste for many centuries.

The reference to Trivenī in Hooghly district in the Bihari version also supports the claim of Rāḍha. Moreover, other places important in the legend such as Gaṅguri (Gaṅguriā) in Burdwan, Kālidaha in Birbhum and Śrīpur in Hooghly, are located in West Bengal and are referred to in almost all the Manasā-maṅgal-kāvyas of the Bengali poets, even when they are known to have come from other parts of Bengal.

We have gathered from our investigations that the rites and ceremonies in connection with the worship of Manasā in Birbhum, Burdwan and Bankura are similar to practices referred to in the early versions of the story and that the cult enjoys its widest popularity in these districts. People of other areas worship Manasā less enthusiastically than do the people of West Bengal.<sup>1</sup>

(2) The claim of Bihar as the early home of the principal legend and the cult cannot be accepted, for the simple reason that in the Bihari version there is no reference to other legends except the principal one. The record of the principal legend indicates a period when the cult

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1. Infra, ~~no~~. Chapter VIII, Part I.

attained a status in society and that in this region the subsidiary stories of the legends were either totally forgotten or ignored. There is reason to believe that before the origin of the principal legend, other legends centering on the cowherds, the farmer Bāchāi and the fishermen's family of Jālu and Mālu had grown up and that the people of these groups or castes were the early founders and worshippers of the goddess.<sup>1</sup> A detailed analysis of these legends also suggests that most of the legends had their origin in West Bengal.<sup>2</sup> It is most likely that the Bihari version records the principal legend as it existed in a period when the songs had gained popularity outside Bengal. Moreover, there are neither any manuscripts as in Bengal and in Assam nor any other literary references to the cult and the legend in the literature of Bihar. The claim of Champā in the Aṅga country of Bihar as the early home of the legend is much less convincing than that of West Bengal. It is to be noted that in the early mediaeval period the geographical boundaries of Bengal cannot be ascertained with precision. It may well be that in those days Bengal was thought to include Champā.

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1. Infra, pp. Chapter V.
  2. Infra, pp. Chapter V.

Thus on balance it seems probable that the cult as well as the legend had their origin in West Bengal and travelled thence to the rest of Bengal, Assam and Bihar, where they are still popular.

## Part II

Scholars differ in their opinions about the historicity of the legend. D.C. Sen, one of the earliest students of the cult, is of the opinion that the legend of Chāndo is purely the product of imagination.<sup>1</sup> He states that, "in a country where woman commonly courted death on their husband's funeral pyre, this story of Behulā may be regarded as the poet's natural tribute at the feet of their ideal."<sup>2</sup> But this view is opposed by R. Chakravarty and D.Chakravarty<sup>3</sup>, who are supported by B.K. Ghose,<sup>4</sup> A. Bhattacharya,<sup>5</sup> T.C. Dasgupta<sup>6</sup> and B.Ghose<sup>7</sup>. According to the latter group of scholars the story has some basis of reality. Bhattacharya argues that the wide popularity of the legend can be accounted for only on the ground that it had some foundation in the historical fact.<sup>8</sup>

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1. Sen, Bāṅga Bhāṣā O Sāhitya, p.116.

2. Sen, H.B.L.L., p.294.

3. Bhaṁsīdās, op.cit., Intro., p.1

4. S.P.P.R., Vol.VII, 3rd issue, B.S.1319, p.146.

5. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., p.200

6. Dasgupta, Prācīn Bāṅglā Sāhityer Itihās, pp.93f.

7. Ghose, Paśchimbaṅger Samskriti, pp.271-273.

8. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., p.201.

D.C. Sen, though he rejects the truth of the legend, believes in the historicity of Chāndo and maintains that he was a leader of Saivism, the firmly established popular religion of the times. He opposed the propagation of the cults of local deities - whose supporters sought and fought for their admission into the Brahmanical pantheon. There are numerous references to Chāndo in village ballads and fairy tales. Chāndo, Sen maintains, was a famous merchant, possibly of the 7th or 8th century A.D. when commercial intercourse spread far and wide and a clash arose between the Brahmanical and local deities, finally leading to a compromise. From this many stories centring on Chāndo had their origin. With the increase in the number of devotees of Manasā, Sen continues, the legends of Chāndo and Behulā seem to have been firmly believed to be real.<sup>1</sup>

Against this view Bhattacharya maintains that, just as the great Indian Epic Rāmāyana developed out of the simple story of the banishment of prince Rāma, the tragic death by snake bite of the son of a wealthy merchant on his bridal night seems to have been the basis of the Manasāmaṅgalkāvya.<sup>2</sup> This hypothesis is supported by Dasgupta

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1. Sen, Baṅga Bhāshā O Sāhitya, p.116.

2. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., p.201.

who maintains that the claim of many places to be the residences of the legendary characters and the strong belief among the Gandhabaniks in the real existence of Behulā and Chāndo lead one to believe that the legend has a kernel of truth.<sup>1</sup> A similar view is championed by B.Ghose who maintains that all the legendary characters such as Chāndo and Lakhindar in the Manasā-kāvya and Dhanapati of the Chandī-kāvya are based on actual members of the merchant class who played a great role in trade and commerce for centuries together. Ghose points out that names ending in "Datta" (e.g. Hima Datta, Shashthi Datta, Srī Datta, Mahi Datta, Rājya Datta) occur in an inscription of the 6th century A.D. found at Mallasarul in the district of Burdwan and he believes that these were the ancestors of the merchant caste. 1000 years later the poet Mukundarām gives many names of Gandhabaniks bearing the surname "Datta". Even today wealthy people of merchant caste live in villages on the banks of the rivers Ajaya, Damodar and others. Their homes are usually in old buildings which give evidence of wealth. For the thousand years between the Mallasāml inscription and the age of Mukundarām there is no written history of the merchant class. Karjanā,

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1. Dasgupta, Prāchin Bāṅglā Sāhityer Itihās, p.94.

Ujāni, Bardhamān, Chāmpāinagar and other places inhabited by these people, which are often referred to in the mediaeval literature, are not far from Mallasarul. If the lines of the people referred to in the inscription did not totally die out, the stories of Chāndo and Dhanapati, especially of their wealth and trade, bear some relation to reality. The reference to the presence of the representatives of 700 merchant families in the house of Dhanapati at Ujāni in the Chandīkāvya indicates the existence of a prosperous community of merchant in the intervening period, who had long resided in the district.<sup>1</sup>

N.K. Bhattasali identifies Chāndo with Sri Chandra Deva, the Chandra King of East Bengal who is believed to have ruled circa 975-1000 A.D.<sup>2</sup> It has also been suggested by Siba Chandra Seal that Chāndo or Chandradhara is identical with Hariśchandra or Harichandra of the same dynasty. He further adds that this Chandra king also ruled in Sāvār in the district of Dacca.<sup>3</sup> But this hypothesis cannot be accepted as the inscriptional Hariśchandra was a local Buddhist ruler of Sāvār having no connection with the

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1. Ghose, Paśchimbaṅger Saṃskṛiti, pp.271-273.

2. Bhattasali, op.cit., p.225.

3. S.P.P., Vol.XXVII, B.S.1327, pp.157-172.



Chandra dynasty.<sup>1</sup> However these identifications cannot stand for two reasons. First, Chāndo was a strict devotee of Siva. Nowhere in the texts is he referred to as inclining to any other worship than that of the deities of the Hindu pantheon. It is known however from inscriptional evidence that both the Chandra kings and the rulers of Sāvār were Buddhists. Bhattasālī admits that orthodox Buddhism was largely intermixed with the Saiva Tāntricism during the period from 7th to 10th century.<sup>2</sup> No doubt he is right enough, but there is not the slightest trace of Buddhism in any version of the story, and if the prototype of Chāndo had been a Buddhist, however corrupt, such influence would surely have been found. Secondly, we have shown that the legend probably originated in Rāḍha<sup>3</sup> so it is unlikely that the prototype of the hero resided in Eastern Bengal.

Nevertheless the argument persists that some prototype of the legendary hero Chāndo really existed in a period when the cult of Manasā began to evolve in Bengali Society. The earliest poet on Manasā Devī, Hari Datta of Mymensingh, has

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1. Sen, Brihat Baṅga, Part 1, pp.9,277-282; History of Bengal, Vol. 1, pp.418f (footnote).

2. Bhattasālī, op.cit., p.225.

3. Supra, Chapter IV, Part I.

been assigned to the 12th or 13th century,<sup>1</sup> so the legend was probably widely current before he composed his poems, and as we have shown, it did not first appear in Mymensingh, but in Rāḍha. It is reasonable to allow some 150 or 200 years for the legend to originate and spread. The evidence thus points to a date in the 10th or 11th century for the historical prototype of the legendary Chāndo and naturally by this time the legend of Behulā and Lakhindar had originated. This hypothesis is supported by S.K. Chatterjee who believes the existence of the prototype story of Behulā and Lakhinder in the pre-Muhammadan period.<sup>2</sup>

A critical study of the Manasāmaṅgal-kāvyas clearly suggests that before the origin of the principal legend, other legends, such as the story of cowherds, of the farmer Bachāi, and of the fisherman's family had grown up connecting the goddess with low class people. If the principal legend can be dated to the 10th or 11th century, it is reasonable to allow about a hundred years for a goddess to become popular with the upper classes among whom the principal legend originated. This points to a date in the 9th - 10th centuries at the latest for the origin of the goddess in Bengali society. Consequently the legends of the cowherds, the

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1. Sen, H.B.L.L., p.277; Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., p.222; Dasgupta, Prāchin Bāṅglā Sāhityer Itihās, pp.101f; Bhattasali, op.cit., p.224; B.Chaudhuri, Bāṅglā Sāhityer Itikathā, p.168.
  2. History of Bengal, Vol.1, p.392.

farmer Bachāi and the fisherman's family developed and spread shortly after this. Like the principal legend these legends excepting the story of Bachāi, seem to have originated in Rāḍha or West Bengal.<sup>1</sup> The whole story probably reached something like its present form around the time of the Muslim invasion.

This hypothesis is suggested also by the peculiar status of Chāndo, who is at the same time a rich merchant and a ruling chief or king. We have no evidence of the existence of such figures in pre-Muslim Bengal, or in the period of the Muslim Sultans. Chāndo rather suggests the Zamindar of the 18th century, when the Mughal grip was weakening and the British regime was not fully established. It may be suggested, though only very tentatively, that Chāndo's status in fact reflects conditions in West Bengal after the retreat of the Senas, in the period before Muslim rule was consolidated. Such conditions would provide opportunities for wealthy merchants, with the aid of the small private armies with which they guarded their warehouses and carvans, to establish themselves as local chiefs.

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1. Infra, pp. 271-282

## CHAPTER V

### Evolution of the goddess

We consider here the gradual evolution of the cult of Manasā, from one stage to another, and the change in the social status of the worshippers. Some indications of this development are to be found in the texts of the legends, for it seems that certain features of the story can be explained on a sociological basis. The present study is mainly based on the accounts of the late 15th century poets - Bipradās of West Bengal and Bijay Gupta and Nārāyan Deb of East Bengal.

#### 1. Worship by the lower classes

##### (a) Cowherds

Of the three early poets two - Bipradās and Nārāyan Deb - record that Manasā was first worshipped by cowherds. We have already seen how, in the version Bipradās, the goddess Manasā herself preached her cult, among the cowherds.<sup>1</sup> According to Nārāyan Deb while, Śiva was returning home with Manasā from Kālidaha, he stopped in a meadow. There Manasā begged milk of the cowherd boys, who refused her. At once they all fell down senseless at her glance. At this their mothers

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1. Supra, pp. 137-139.      • Bipradās, op.cit., pp.59-63.

wept, and Śiva instructed them to worship Manasā, who could easily bring them back to life. Śiva further told them to take help from the sage ~~Supabara~~ or Sutabara, who came and instructed them how to worship Manasā. Satisfied with their devotion, Manasā brought the boys back to life. Moreover they got what they desired by her grace.<sup>1</sup> Bijay Gupta differs from both Bipradās and Nārāyaṇ Deb. He records that when Manasā lamented to Neto that her cult was not spread among the men, the latter asked her to meet Śiva, who alone could help her. Manasā met Śiva and requested him to bless her so that she might be worshipped by men. Śiva consoled her with a promise to spread her cult and asked Viśvakarmā to make an earthen pot. He carried the pot on his head in the guise of a Brahman and appeared before the cowherds who were gambling. Among them was a Chāṇḍāla (outcaste) boy named Lātik, who came forward, asked Śiva whence he came and enquired about the pot. Śiva answered that it represented the goddess Manasā, and added that one who worshipped her wholeheartedly was blessed with all round success. The boy was impressed and asked Śiva whether he would be able to win the game by the grace of goddess,

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1. Nārāyaṇ Deb, op.cit., p.23.

because he was defeated every day. On getting a positive answer the boy uttered the name of Manasā as he began to play, and finally won the game. Then he was so convinced on the power of the goddess that he learnt the method of her worship from Śiva, who disappeared, leaving the pot behind. Next the boy accompanied by the rest of the cowherds, made elaborate arrangements for her worship, building a temporary mandapa (pavilion) on the pasture. Besides the sacrificial offerings as told by Bipradās,<sup>1</sup> goats were also slaughtered in honour of the goddess. After the performance of her worship, all the cowherds were blessed by the goddess, who appeared and granted boons to them as they desired. They continued to worship the goddess daily.

Similar arrangements for her worship were made by some cowherds of Srābantipur. Manasā showed her powers here by hiding their cows, which created a great panic among them. The goddess appeared before them in the guise of an ascetic (Yati),<sup>2</sup> and told them that if they worshipped Manasā, they would surely get back all their cows. They worshipped her as the former cowherds

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1. Supra, p. 135-

2. The Bengali word Yati also means beggar.

had done, and were given back their cows and blessed with various boons. From this time onwards they used to worship the pot of Manasā daily.<sup>1</sup>

The variations in the stories of the cowherds, as told by three different poets, are minor ones and are probably chiefly due to the migration of the stories by oral tradition. The differences in the western and eastern versions represented by Bipradās and Bijay Gupta respectively are very significant. First, as regards the ritual the cowherds of the former version worshipped the goddess only on the Daśamī tithi of the bright half of Jyāishṭha with a twig of siṅ in addition to the sacred pot - a widely current practice of present day west Bengal, whereas those of the latter version worshipped the goddess daily without the siṅ. The reference to daily worship in both the stories of the latter version that it represents suggests the developed phase of the cult.

Secondly, the association of snakes with Manasā is only referred to in the former version. When her identity was challenged, Manasā summoned the snakes before the cowherds to exhibit her power. Her identity was not questioned in the latter version. Being asked by Lātik

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1. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., pp.51-54.

Śiva introduced Manasā as the goddess of success in general. This suggests that the power of the goddess was extended and her original character as a snake goddess was overshadowed. It is not likely that this would happen until the cult was well established.

Thirdly, it is said in the former version that besides other boons, Manasā assured immunity from snake bite. No such reference is made in the latter version.

Lastly, in the latter version Śiva directly attempted to spread the cult whereas there is no such patronage of Śiva in the former version. It seems that this innovation in the story is an attempt on the part of the poet to increase the social status of the goddess and thus to make her more popular among the better class people.

The reference to the special boon of immunity from snake bite and to the exhibition of the power of Manasā over snakes in the former version on the one hand and to the daily worship and the activity of Śiva in spreading the cult in the latter on the other, evidently indicate that the former records an earlier tradition than the latter. The reference to the sage Surabara in the version of Nārāyaṇ Deb as an instructor of Manasā worship is also significant. This suggests that the poet



records a tradition of the period when the goddess had already been recognized, in the society.

Thus it seems more probable that west Bengal was the early home of the cult and the story, which travelled thence to the rest of Bengal. This can be further substantiated by the fact that even today in some places of west Bengal this sort of worship is performed by cowherds (in Bengali Rākhāls) or by villagers in general in an open field under a tree, and this is popularly Rākhāl Manasā pūjā.<sup>1</sup>

(b) The Farmer Bachāi

Another story recorded by eastern poets<sup>2</sup> tells us that Manasā was worshipped by a farmer named Bachāi. According to Bijay Gupta, on the way home Śiva accompanied by Manasā, who was secretly carried in the flower basket of Śiva, went to the house of Bachāi and placed the basket on the sloping roof of the pūjā maṇḍapa<sup>3</sup> (shrine) while he went to bathe in the nearby ghāṭ named Manikarnikā.

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1. Infra, pp. 403, 405.f.

2. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., pp. 14-16; Nārāyan Deb, op.cit., pp. 23-27, Bamsīdās, op.cit., pp. 120-126.

3. Generally a thatched hut in the family compound, commonly open on more than one side, which serves various purposes such as the worship of deities on prescribed days, a place of occasional residence and indoor games, and many household purposes.

Why Śiva did this is explained by the 17th century poet Baṁśidās, who writes that, seeing the domain of Bachāi, Śiva thinks to himself "I must arrange the worship of my daughter (Manasā) here as she is motherless and there is none to take care of her. Let the people worship her for her virtues (power)."<sup>1</sup> In the meantime Bachāi returned from the fields thoroughly exhausted, and retired to rest in the pūjā maṇḍapa. There he saw the basket and enquired about it of his mother, who told him that it was Śiva's. He was glad when he heard this and brought down the basket from the roof. In it he found a very beautiful girl. He was so amazed that he started dancing and clapping his hands and was tempted to think of her as his bride. He said that Śiva had brought the girl for him, as he knew that he was a bachelor.<sup>2</sup> On this assumption he asked his mother to arrange his marriage with Manasā. Such a danger was averted by Manasā very smoothly. She looked at him through her poison eye, instead of through her amṛita eye. As a result he fell down shouting, "O mother! I am about to die; look at me." Hearing his shouts his mother

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1. Baṁśidās, op.cit., p.121.

2. Different readings are found in the version of Nārāyaṇ Deb. It is stated in the version of Nārāyaṇ Deb that Bachai had more than one wife and he expressed his desire to marry Manasā and to divorce his existing wives (Nārāyaṇ Deb, op.cit., p.24).

came to the spot, and started crying on seeing her son lying dead. At this time Śiva returned and told the mother that her son would be brought back to life by the grace of Manasā, if the mother would worship her.

The mother promised to worship her, if her only child was restored to life. Then Manasā looked at Bachāi through her amrita eye and he recovered. At this Śiva and the mother were excited and started dancing. In the meanwhile Bachāi came to the goddess after taking a bath, and begged forgiveness for his humiliating proposal of marriage. He expressed his desire to make all necessary arrangements for her worship. The goddess was worshipped in the form of pots, and goats were sacrificed with other offerings. Bachāi performed her worship as desired by the goddess and he was blessed with general prosperity. Baṃśīdas adds that the neighbours were tempted to worship Manasā on seeing Bachāi's prosperity and when they did so they they too were blessed with boons and became rich. Needless to say the power of the goddess was extended with the increase of her devotees and she not only blessed her worshippers with wealth in general but also bestowed children on the childless. The performance of her worship

by lepers and blind people cured them.<sup>1</sup> All the above practices in relation to the worship of snakes or a snake deity are current in many parts of India.<sup>2</sup>

This story is absent in West Bengal and North Bengal versions of the Manasākāvya but it occurs with little or no variation in every east Bengal version. However, of the two early eastern poets Bijay Gupta states that Manasā was first worshipped by Bachāi, while in Nārāyaṇ Deb's version this story appears after her worship by the cowherds. But it is surprising that, though the reference to the first worship of Manasā by Bachāi is made by Bijay Gupta, he clearly states afterwards that Manasā lamented to Neto that her cult was not spread among men.<sup>3</sup> On the advice of Neto Manasā took direct help from Śiva, who introduced her worship among the cowherds as we have seen already. The same inconsistency is found in the later version of Baṁśīdās.<sup>4</sup>

From this inconsistency it seems to us that when the cult, accompanied by the story of the cowherds, was carried orally from west Bengal to east Bengal, the

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1. Baṁśīdās, op.cit., p.126.

2. Supra, pp. 66-70 ; ERE., Vol.XI, p.416; Vogel, op.cit., pp.270, 273, 274; M.Williams, op.cit., p.324.

3. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., p.52.

4. Baṁśīdās, op.cit., pp.120f., 175.

farming people of the latter region, as represented by the farmer Bachāi, were the first or one of the first groups to start worshipping the goddess. This may account for the inconsistency in the two version. As in the case of the cowherds, here also we find the activity of Śiva in spreading the cult of Manasā which evidently indicates the attempt of the poet to increase the status of the goddess and thus to make her popular among the farming, class, who at the time worshipped chiefly the popular Śiva, commonly known as the Kṛishaka-devatā (Farmer's God). As in the story of the cowherds told by the early eastern poets no reference is made here either to the identity of the goddess or to her association with snakes. This indicates that her cult had already entered a developed phase.

(c) A fisherman's family

Then the cult spread among the fisherman caste as we find the stories centering the family of a fisherman. How the cult of Manasā was introduced in the family of the fisherman brothers Jālu and Mālu, according to Bipradās, has already been told.<sup>1</sup> This episode is narrated by the eastern poet Bijay Gupta<sup>2</sup> with some variations. Here

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1. Supra, pp. 141-142 ; Bipradās, op.cit., pp. 86-87.

2. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., pp. 101-104; The story of the fisherman's family is absent in the version of Nārāyan Deb.

Jālu was promised by Manasā in a dream that he would become rich if he fished in the river Kālidaha. Next day Jālu, accompanied by his brother Mālu, went to fish in the river, and Jālu found a golden pot in his catch. As in the previous version, the two returned home, and prepared to worship the pot. Jālu collected various sacrificial requisites and called good Brahmins together for the ceremony. Further details of the rite are not mentioned.

The significant difference between the western and eastern versions of this episode is that there is no mention of a Brahmin priest participating in the worship of Manasā in the former version, whereas in the latter the Brahmins performed the priestly function, but the part played by them is not mentioned. The participation of the Brahmin is not likely on the early stage of the cult; so the eastern version must have been composed at a time when the cult had already acquired respectability.

It appears from these stories relating to the cowherds, the farmer Bachāi and the fisherman's family that the cult of Manasā first spread among those people, whose work is often rendered dangerous by snakes. So it is quite natural that they should be the first groups in society to worship the goddess and to acknowledge the wide range of her power. Socially they constituted the lower

strate of the society. Thus the goddess had her origin as a non-Brahmanical deity among non-Aryan people.

## 2. Worship by upper class women

We may infer from the Kāvya that the cult spread next among the womenfolk of the upper classes. According to Bipradās hearing the news of the prosperity of the fisherman's family of Jālu and Mālu, Sanakā visited their house and learnt about the goddess Manasā from the mother of the fisherman brothers. She took home a couple of pots and began to worship them, accompanied by her six daughters-in-law. Chāndo, who did not consider Manasā to be a goddess, smashed the sacred pots into pieces when he saw his wife Sanakā worshipping them.<sup>1</sup> Bijay Gupta states that Sanakā had worshipped Manasā from her childhood<sup>2</sup> and it was the blessings of Manasā that made her fortunate, to become the mother of six brilliant children.<sup>3</sup> It is not mentioned in this version how Sanakā had adopted the cult. However, Sanakā was grudgingly permitted by Chāndo to worship Manasā, and she did so secretly, as is the present practice among Bengali housewives in many families, when they worship peculiar deities against their

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1. Supra, pp. 142-143; Bipradās, op.cit., pp. 87]89.

2. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., pp. 64, 65, 102.

3. Ibid., pp. 64, 108.

their husbands' wishes. One day Sanakā was called by Chāndo but she replied to the messenger that she would come later, as she was then worshipping Manasā. This message roused great anger in Chāndo, who came to the spot and broke the pot of Manasā into pieces.<sup>1</sup>

It would appear from both the versions that the smashing of the pots of Manasā by Chāndo made him a great enemy of the goddess and led to the inimical relations between them which form the basis of the principal legend of the Manasāmaṅgalkāvya.<sup>2</sup> Bijay Gupta adds that when Chāndo's six sons died of snake-bite, Chāndo abused Manasā and mocked Sanakā, saying that though she secretly continued her worship against his will, it had proved useless, as their sons were bitten to death by a snake of her patron goddess. He also threatened that if she continued to worship Manasā he would kill her. As a result of this strict injunction Sanakā discontinued the worshipping of Manasā.<sup>3</sup> The same poet further records that one day Sanakā came to the house of the fisherman brothers Jālu and Mālu at the request of Manasā, who had appeared before her in the guise of her aunt and told her

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1. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., pp. 64f.
  2. Supra, pp. 142-172 .
  3. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., p. 100.



to worship Manasā in the fisherman's house, where she would receive boons. There Sanakā was blessed with a male child who would be born as Lakhindar.<sup>1</sup> It is told by Nārāyaṇ Deb that Sumitra, the mother of Behulā also worshipped Manasā daily<sup>2</sup> and Behulā was born to her by the blessings of the goddess.<sup>3</sup>

Evidence of the spread of the cult among the womenfolk of the next generation is found in the story of Behulā who worshipped Manasā from her childhood<sup>4</sup> and finally restored the lost lives through her faith in the goddess. According to Nārāyaṇ Deb Behulā was asked by Manasā to bathe in the river Muktāsar (in Bipradāsā Mukutā-Sahar) when she would be blessed with boons as she desired.<sup>5</sup> It is added by Bijay Gupta that Behulā was also told in the dream that the son of Chāndo would become her husband and that if she failed to go to the river she would remain unmarried for twelve years.<sup>6</sup> Nārāyaṇ Deb adds that Behulā was told by her mother to worship Manasā with full devotion. Reaching the river

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1. Ibid., pp. 103-104.
  2. Nārāyaṇ Deb, op.cit., p. 155.
  3. Ibid., p. 56.
  4. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., pp. 212, 232.
  5. Nārāyaṇ Deb, op.cit., p. 240.
  6. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., p. 162.

she worshipped the goddess in the form of five golden pots<sup>1</sup> with golden lotuses.<sup>2</sup> Bijay Gupta differs, saying that after her bath Behulā, accompanied by her attendants, went to the temple of Manasā in Uttarnāpara to pay homage to the goddess, and there she prayed that the son of Chāndo might become her husband.<sup>3</sup> In Bipradās's version there is no mention of the dream. According to this version, while bathing in Mukutā-Sahar, Behulā was cursed by Manasā in the guise of an old Brahman woman, and told that her husband would die on the bridal night, but Behulā ignored the curse with a reply that she was sure to get help from Manasā.<sup>4</sup>

When Chāndo, seeking a bride for his son, as a test gave iron pills for boiling to the merchant Sāhe, only Behulā could boil them, for she had worshipped Manasā before starting cooking.<sup>5</sup> Similar references to Behulā's devotion to Manasā are not lacking in our texts. Just before the performance of her marriage ceremony Behulā toured the whole of the village Ujāni and

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1. That the pots were of gold is mentioned in many versions, and this feature of the story seems unrealistic. Probably an earthen pot of golden colour, or one covered with gold leaf, is referred to. This may also be inferred from the fact that Chāndo is later said to have smashed the golden pots into pieces, which could hardly be possible if they were made of metal (Bipradās, op.cit., p.89). Alternatively it may be suggested that the use of the gold pots is a later addition by the poets describing events in an imagined golden age, when gold was a common metal.
  2. Narāyan Deb, op.cit., p.241.
  3. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., p.165.
  4. Bipradās, op.cit., p.171.
  5. Ibid., p.175; Narāyan Deb, op.cit., p.247.

worshipped Manasā with numerous offerings. Manasā was so pleased with her devotee that she appeared before her and at the request of Behulā she presented a bodice to her on the occasion of her marriage.<sup>1</sup>

It is reported that the members of the merchant caste in Birbhum and other castes of the same district, of Jalpaiguri and of Darjeeling, worship the goddess before a marriage ceremony is performed.<sup>2</sup> There are two plausible explanations of its origin. The present practice may have originated after the example of the worship of Manasā by Behulā, a member of the merchant caste, since it is similar in many respects to the practice followed by Behulā according to the legend. Alternatively it is possible that in ancient days snakes or a snake divinity were worshipped as a part of the marriage ceremony, especially of the lower castes, in many parts of India. Similar practices are not lacking outside Bengal. The snake is worshipped at the time of marriages, especially by the Bedars of the Deccan,<sup>3</sup> the Brahmans in Kanara<sup>4</sup> and the Lambadis in Madras.<sup>5</sup> It seems then that the practice of worshipping Manasā by the people of the merchant caste in particular and other castes in general is the survival of a

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1. Bipradās, op.cit., p.188.

2. Infra, p. 429-

3. Bombay Gazeteer, Vol.XXIII, 1884, p.96.

4. Ibid., Vol.XV, Part I, 1883, p.171.

5. E. Thurston, Omens and Superstitions, p.136.

widespread non-Aryan custom, and that when the cult of Manasā evolved in society the practice of worshipping snakes before a marriage ceremony was incorporated in the worship of Manasā.

Once again Behulā proved herself a devotee of Manasā when she was able to restore her husband Lakhindar to consciousness. At the time of their marriage ceremony, according to Bipradās, Lakhindar fell down senseless on seeing some snakes sent by Manasā. This created great distress and Behulā, accompanied by some attendants, went out to worship Manasā in a particular sacred place under a tree. Manasā appeared and gave her a golden pot containing sacred water, saying that when some water from the pot was sprinkled on her husband's body, he would recover. Behulā returned and did accordingly. Thus Lakhindar recovered and the ceremony was ended.<sup>1</sup> Similar descriptions are found in two other contemporary east Bengal versions.<sup>2</sup> The only difference in Nārāyan Deb's version is the mention of a Brahman priest accompanying Behulā at the time of her departure to worship Manasā.<sup>3</sup> Just as in Bijay Gupta's account of the worship of the goddess in the fisherman's family, the recruitment of a

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1. Bipradās, op.cit., pp.192-194.

2. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., pp.188-193; Nārāyan Deb, op.cit., pp.35-41.

3. Nārāyan Deb., op.cit., p.38.

Brahman priest is mentioned in the version of Nārāyan Deb, but in both versions the part played by Brahmans is not clearly depicted. As in the case of the former, the other eastern poet must refer to a time when the goddess had acquired status in the society. This also suggests the claim of west Bengal as the early home of the cult, for there is no mention in the early west Bengal version<sup>1</sup> of Brahmans acting as priests at the worship of Manasā.

Thus from among the lower class people the goddess rose in status and found a place for herself among the deities worshipped by the women-folk of the upper classes.

### 3. Worship by the upper class men.

From the women-folk of the upper classes the cult again took a step forward - a step which established the goddess in every home of Bengali society, including the Muslims, as well as in some parts of the adjoining provinces. For the establishment of her cult Manasā had to face varied trouble. Chāndō, according to all versions, was a leader of the opposition group which opposed the spread of the cult of Manasā among the upper classes. But finally he had to surrender to the goddess after years of opposition. Before his surrender, the men-folk of some other localities

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1. Bipradās, op.cit., pp.86-88, 192-194.

admitted to the power of the goddess and started worshipping her, as is evident from the version of Bipradās.

On the way home after a shipwreck, Chāndo took shelter for a night in his friend's house. At night he was given food which had been offered to Manasā, and after his meal he suddenly noticed a pot of Manasā in the room. This so enraged Chāndo that he immediately left the room and vomited up the food he had taken, probably thinking it to have been offered to his antagonist. He prepared to start for home, as he did not want to live in a house where Manasā was venerated. But he grudgingly stayed the night at his friend's request.<sup>1</sup> Again, when Chāndo visited the house of Sāhe with the proposal of his son's marriage with his daughter Behulā, he was requested by Sāhe to worship Manasā, who alone could save the life of his only living son from snake bite, as it was predicted that this son would be bitten by a snake on his bridal night.<sup>2</sup> These incidents indicate that in some localities the cult had found a place among the men-folk of the upper classes even before the events symbolised by Chāndo's surrender. No such story is found in any early east Bengal version.

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1. Bipradās, op.cit., p.165; also see Ketakadās, op.cit., pp.204f.

2. Ibid., p.174.

When Behulā returned with her husband Lakhindar, her six brothers-in-law and the rest of the victims who were killed by Manasā, everybody in the city of Champaka was surprised at the power of Manasā. Through her devotion to Manasā Behulā had been successful in restoring the lives of these persons on condition that her father-in-law Chāndo would worship the goddess. And if Chāndo ignored her, she would again kill all his sons. The story of her oath to the goddess was told by Behulā to Chāndo. He was then urged to worship the goddess not only by Sanakā and Behulā but also by everyone in the city. Chāndo could not resist this pressure and finally, according to Bipradās, agreed to worship Manasā after a further display of the power of the goddess, who brought his boats complete with cargoes back to the house gate.<sup>1</sup> It is told by Bijay Gupta that Chāndo agreed to worship the goddess with offerings given in the left hand, when he was told by Chāṇḍī that the goddess Manasā was identical with Bhagavatī. But Chāndo totally changed his views about the goddess, whom he had so long rejected because of her low origin, when he saw Durgā and Manasā sitting side by side in a chariot and looking exactly alike.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Bipradās, op.cit., p.174.

2. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., pp.228-229; Also see Baṃśīdās, op.cit., p.646.

A sacred gold pot<sup>1</sup> of Manasā was placed permanently in the house of Chāndo, the Brahmans were invited to perform the rites, and the goddess was worshipped with offerings of various fruits and sacrificial animals. The goddess appeared and Chāndo was pardoned.

The difference between the western and eastern versions lies in the cause of the final surrender of Chāndo, which is significant for more than one reason. In the former version Chāndo surrendered to the goddess on realizing her magical power but in the latter he was asked to worship Manasā because of her identity with either Bhagavatī or Durgā. It seems that in eastern Bengal the cult had acquired higher status, not on account of the special power attributed to the goddess but because of her relations with the upper class deities. Secondly, this story also suggests that the cult gained popularity in the east long after its establishment in west Bengal.

Thus, according to all versions, the goddess was now for the first time worshipped with the officiation of Brahman priests. This reflects the final acceptance of the goddess in every Hindu family including those of the Brahmans, as is evident from their performance of priestly functions at Manasā worship. The practice is still current in Bengal, Assam and Bihar.

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1. In the version of Bijay Gupta the reference is made to five pots (p.246).



#### 4. Worship by Muslims.

The cult was not confined to the Hindus but it extended among the Muslims. This is supported by textual evidence as well as from the present practice in some parts of Bengal. How the Muslims started worshipping Manasā is vividly depicted by both the early western and eastern poets. We have already narrated the story in detail, as told by Bipradās.<sup>1</sup> It is as follows. Once, while worshipping the goddess Manasā, the cowherds were attacked by Muslim farmers. Manasā punished them and the matter was taken up by the Muslim chief Hāsan and his brother Husen who fought against Manasā. Manasā sent her snakes who killed all the soldiers of Hāsan, including his brother. Finally Hāsan submitted to Manasā, who appeared personally and brought back the lost lives and property. Hāsan worshipped the goddess with the officiation of Brahman priests. Bijay Gupta<sup>2</sup> differs and records that one stormy day a Molla took shelter in the mandapa of Manasā in a forest. There he saw the cowherds worshipping the pots of Manasā. He thought that this was "ghost worship", which he could not tolerate. When he was about to break the pots, the cowherds in a body attacked him and humiliated him in various ways. The news was

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1. Bipradās, op.cit., pp. 63-86; Supra, pp. 139-141.

2. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., pp. 54-62.

reported to Hāsan and Husen, who, according to Bipradās, were defeated by Manasā.

The difference between the western and eastern versions is that in the former version Manasā personally appeared before Hāsan and requested him to worship her in order to restore the lost lives, whereas in the latter version Manasā sent the sage Nārada with a golden pot to Hāsan and Husen, who enquired about the pot as the cowherd boy Lātik had done. Nārada promised them that if they worshipped the goddess in the form of a pot the lost lives and property would be restored. Moreover, Husen was not killed, as in the former version. The pot which was carried by Nārada was bought by Hāsan and Husen.

Then, according to both versions, Manasā was worshipped in the form of a pot with the officiation of Brahman priests. The consultation of the Muslim chief with the Brahmans suggests two things: first, that in their dealings with Muslims and lower class Hindus the brahmans in the 14th-15th centuries had become unorthodox; secondly, that by this time, the cult had already been established among the upper classes. Over and above this, this episode gives evidence of the acceptance of the Hindu customs and festivals by the Muslims.

After a period of Muslim settlement in Bengal and their domination as rulers, there seems to have arisen a mutual understanding between the two religions. This mainly affected the lower classes, but may not have always been the case with the upper strata of society. In the past Hindus and Muslims have formed a single unit in respect of many of their beliefs and practices. Particularly in Bengal both the communities show this more fully than elsewhere. Thus it seems that the folk-culture of Bengal - a culture where the people of both communities share the common beliefs - is the product of the lower strata of society, and the upper class people have had little or nothing to do with it. The cause of this particularly harmonious relationship in Bengal is not far to seek. Ethnographically it has been proved that a good number of Bengal Muslims are converts either from the lower class Hindus or the Buddhists.<sup>1</sup> Such conversions after the Muslim invasion of Bengal are reflected in some of the early Bengali literature.<sup>2</sup> So it is to be expected that some traces of ancestral beliefs and customs survived among those converts.

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1. J'afar Sharif: Qanun-i-Islam, Trans. by G.A. Herklots, p.7; B. Ghose, Bāṅglār Nava Jagriti, vol.1, pp.112-119; A. Karim, Social History of the Muslims in Bengal, p.158.
  2. "Nirāñjaner Rushmā" in Sūnya Purāṇa, Ed. C.C. Bandopadhyay.

The names of the two Muslim chiefs, Hāsan and Husen, are those of the two martyrs of Qarbala, according to the Shī'a tradition. This might suggest that, in so far as she influenced the Muslims of Bengal, the goddess make her first and strongest impression upon Shī'a communities, who are more prone to syncretistic cults than are the more orthodox Sunnis.

Not only have the Muslims been attached to the local beliefs and practices of the Hindus, at least until recent years, but they have also been much inclined to Hindu mythology and tradition. This is well exemplified by literary evidence. One of the late 16th century Muslim poets is grieved at the general negligence of the Bengali Muslims towards their own religion, and on the other hand their ardent attachment to the Mahābhārata.<sup>1</sup> It is stated by a Muslim authority of the early 19th century that "in Bengal ... it was the practice of low class Musalmāns to join the Durgā Pūjā or other Hindu festivals. They are very careful about omens and auspicious days, and dates for weddings and other rites are fixed after consulting Hindu Pandits. Hindu deities, like Sitalā who controls smallpox and Rakshyā Kālī who protects her votaries from cholera, are worshipped during the epidemics."<sup>2</sup>

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1. Sayyid Sultan: Ophate Rasul, Ed. Ali Ahmed, Preface

2. Jafar Sharif, op.cit., p.8.

The same author also records similar participation of Muslims in Hindu festivals in other parts of India. He does not forget to mention the reciprocal influence of the two communities.<sup>1</sup> The Hindus of Bihar and in upper India take part in the Muslim feast of the Muharram no less earnestly than the Muslims.<sup>2</sup> It has been rightly observed by D.C.Sen: "The great communities of Bengal - the Hindus and the Moslems - once thus joined with each other in their festive ceremonies, apparently participating in their mutual beliefs without losing regard for their respective creeds."<sup>3</sup>

Thus it is not surprising to find the Bengali Muslims worshipping Manasā. Snakes are objects of fear to all people, so it is to be expected that Manasā should be worshipped by people of all castes and creeds to guard against snake bite in a country where many people die from it each year. Bengali Muslims were no less enthusiastic than Hindus in copying the old Bengali manuscripts of the poems depicting the power of the goddess.<sup>4</sup> It is also of interest to note that "the literature of ballads - of the

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1. Ibid., pp. 8f.

2. Ibid.; Risley, Tribes and Castes of Bengal, Vol. 1, p. 534; D.C.Sen, Eastern Bengal Ballads, Vol. III, Part 1, p. 237.

3. Sen, Eastern Bengal Ballads, Vol. III, Part 1, p. 4; cf. T.C. Dasgupta, Prachin Bangla Sahityer Kathā, p. 129. Dasgupta, quoting the version of Ketakadas, further draws our attention to the fact that besides other safeguards against snake bite Lakhindar is said to have kept the Q'uran in the sealed chamber (p. 129).

4. Sen, Eastern Bengal Ballads, Vol. III, Part 1, p. 4; Petavel and Sen, Behula, the Indian Pilgrim's Progress, p. Intro iv.

Manasā cult and of folklore generally - are (sic) almost entirely in the hands of Mahomedans in Eastern Bengal."<sup>1</sup>

In eastern Bengal and Assam down to the first quarter of the present century there were professional Muslim singers who sang songs in honour of Manasā.<sup>2</sup> It is also reported that Muslims of west Bengal still directly or indirectly participate in the worship of Manasā.<sup>3</sup>

Thus Manasā was originally a local goddess worshipped by the non-Aryans as represented by the cowherds, the farmers and the fishermen, but by and by she came to gain popularity, first among the womenfolk of the upper classes and then among the upper class men, including the Brahmans. The cult became so popular that the goddess was respected and worshipped even by the followers of the Prophet. Thus the non-Aryans may take to themselves the credit of having added to the Hindu Pantheon a goddess who is still worshipped by people of all classes.

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1. Sen, Eastern Bengal Ballads, Vol.IV, Part 1, p. Intro. ~~xxx~~.
  2. Sen, Eastern Bengal Ballads, Vol.III, Part 1, p.4; Manasā-Kavya, op.cit., p. Intro. 13.
  3. L.Nos. 2,5,7,9,13,15,16,18,25,28,29 (Bankura); 2,3,6,7,9,10,12,13,18,19,21,23,26,29,30,32,33,26,29,40 (Birbhum); 1,3,4,5,6,7, 9,12,14,15,17,18,20,22,26,27,31,32,33 (Burdwan); 3 (Cooch-Behar); 9,10,12,13 (Hooghly); 1,5,6,10,12-16 (Howrah); 1,7,10,11,13-15 (Jalpaiguri); 1-7, 9,18 (Malda); 3,7, 15,20,22,23,29,36, 42,47, 51,52 (Midnapur); 5,6,8,10,13-15,17,20,23, 24 (Murshidabad); 2,4-6,10-12,15 (Nadia); 2,3,7-9,13,14,16,17,20,21,23 (24-Parganas); 3-9,11-13,15 (West Dinajpure).

## CHAPTER VI

### Relations of Manasā with other cult-divinities

#### Manasā and Chāṇḍī

The relations between Manasā and Maṅgal Chāṇḍī can be traced from their speeches as related in the Manasāmaṅgal-Kāvyas. We should not confuse the Puranic Chāṇḍī or Chāṇḍikā with the Maṅgal Chāṇḍī of local origin, though in a later period both are depicted as one and the same by the poets of Chāṇḍīmaṅgalkāvyas.<sup>1</sup> Chāṇḍī according to the legend, was the stepmother of Manasā. We have seen that Chāṇḍo, the great opponent of Manasā, was instructed by Chāṇḍī not to worship Manasā, as she was wicked and had a bad reputation in heaven.<sup>2</sup> After the final submission of Chāṇḍo to Manasā, he clearly stated the reason why he had so neglected her. He said, "It is Pārvatī who increased the quarrel with you and instructed me not to worship you. I am a disciple of Mahādeva and (my) mother (Chāṇḍī) is mad and she gave a hematāḷa staff into the hand of a madman (also). She said 'why is Manasā being worshipped in your house? She will take on a dark aspect and will bring disaster to you'. Gaurī gave me the hematāḷa staff

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1. For the details see D.C.Sen, H.B.L.L., p.298; A.Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp.327-353; S.B.Dasgupta, Bharater Sakti Sādhana o Sakta Sahitya, pp.174-187. Hereafter Maṅgal Chāṇḍī of the Manasakavya will be referred to as Chāṇḍī.
  2. Bipradas, op.cit., p.57.

and on her advice I broke the pot of Manasā." <sup>1</sup> The hostility between Chandī and Manasā reflected in the kāvyas suggests the existence of early conflicts between the two laukika deities. <sup>2</sup> This view is supported by another passage: when Neto was sent to Gaurī and Gaṅgā by their husband Śiva, they cordially accepted her and she stayed with them. <sup>3</sup> But their reception of Manasā was very different. She was not allowed to stay in the house of her father Śiva, as Chandī vehemently opposed this. When Gaṇeśa told Manasā the story of Śiva's loss of consciousness after drinking the poison, she was very glad to think that her stepmother Chandī would soon become a widow. <sup>4</sup> After the recovery of Śiva through Manasā's intervention, she was praised by the gods and goddesses, and this was not liked by Chandī. It was Chandī whose ill advice deprived Manasā of a happy home life. <sup>5</sup> Thus from the very beginning we find an attitude of mutual hostility between the two goddesses, and this hostility, rather than that existing between Śiva and Manasā, is reflected throughout the Kāvyas.

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1. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., p.284.
  2. This point is referred to by S.Sen and Swami Sankarananda (Bipradās, op.cit., p.Intro.XXX and Manasā Charit, p.111).
  3. Nārāyaṇ Deb, op.cit., p.15.
  4. Ketakadās, op.cit., p.35.
  5. Supra, pp. 133-135 ; Bipradās, op.cit., pp.43-45.



The opposition of Chāṇḍo as an ardent devotee of Śiva seems to be a later addition to the legend, dating from a time when the cult of Manasā was beginning to find a foothold in society, and when the Brahmans thought of the absorption of these laukika dieties into their own fold by giving them purāṇic garb and relating them to the gods of Brahmanical Hinduism. This is the only feasible explanation of why Manasā came to be considered a daughter of Śiva. That the laukika deities such as Manasā, Maṅgal-Chaṇḍī and Sitalā are first met against a Śaivite background suggests a further phase in the development of the cults, namely an attempt by the Brahmans to make those deities popular among the upper strata of society on a footing similar to that of Śiva. Thus it is evident that the story of the quarrel between Chaṇḍī and Manasā over the spread of their respective cults is earlier than that of the opposition of Śiva and Manasā. This opposition which was manifested in the attacks made by Manasā on devotees of Śiva, seems to have originated <sup>strongly</sup> after the Muslim invasion, when the higher religion was challenged by the alien faith.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Infra, pp. 313 - 314 .

The speeches of both Manasā and Chāṇḍī reflect their reactions and attitudes to each other's activities and reveal the relationship between them. Chāṇḍo, the worshipper of Śiva and Chāṇḍī and the possessor of mahājñāna opposed the spread of the cult of Manasā, who afflicted him in many ways in order to obtain his worship.

The appearance of Manasā before Chāṇḍo in the guise of a harlot dancer in order to take away the mahājñāna is told in the following words: "Manasā feels no hesitation in becoming a dancer to accomplish her terrible purpose, though she is a deva-kanyā. All the gods and goddesses criticised what Manasā was doing and Chāṇḍī laughed."<sup>1</sup> The scorn of Chāṇḍī for Manasā on this account is probably a reflection of similar attitudes towards the new goddess among the devotees of Chāṇḍī.

When Chāṇḍo was wrongly imprisoned by the king of Pāṭan through the magic spell of Manasā, it was not Śiva, whom Chāṇḍo worshipped, but Chāṇḍī who rescued him. While lamenting at night the inertness of 'Haragaurī', Chāṇḍo was told in a dream by Mahāmāyā that he would be released next morning. On the other hand Terā, one of the attendants of Chāṇḍo, was advised in a dream in the same night by Chāṇḍī

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1. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., p. 91.

that his master had been arrested by the king and that this help was earnestly requested. Next morning Chāndo was released by Terā<sup>1</sup>, who proved that his master had been wrongly imprisoned.

While returning from a prosperous sea-voyage Chāndo faced a storm created by Manasā to punish him. All his eleven boats sank with all their belongings, except the flag-ship Madhukar, which had been preserved by Chāṇḍī herself, as Chāndo was aboard it.<sup>2</sup> According to Bijay Gupta Manasā was very annoyed when she knew this and came to Chāṇḍī and threatened her: "If you do not allow me to occupy the boat (of Chāndo), I will kill your (sons) Kārtikeya and Gaṇeśa by poison."<sup>3</sup> This revengeful attitude compelled Chāṇḍī to leave Chāndo's boat, which was finally sunk by the command of Manasā. But according to Nārāyaṇ Deb<sup>4</sup> Chāṇḍī left the boat at Manasā's request and gave her permission to sink it. Though these two versions differ somewhat, both give evidence that the adherents of the two deities were hostile to each other at the very beginning of their evolution on society.

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1. Nārāyaṇ Deb, op.cit., pp.173-174.
  2. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., p.145; Nārāyaṇ Deb, op.cit., p.194.
  3. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., p.145.
  4. Nārāyaṇ Deb, op.cit., p.194.

After the shipwreck Chāndo still suffered at the hands of Manasā. Once he was in such trouble that only Chāṇḍī's intervention saved his life. He was mercilessly beaten and finally ordered to be put to death by a king on a charge of theft, but all attempts ended in failure through the power of Chāṇḍī.<sup>1</sup>

The marriage ceremony of Behulā and Lakhindar was watched by the gods and goddesses from the air. When Manasā arrived on the scene they feared that she might do mischief at the marriage. Chāṇḍī requested Manasā not to make Behulā a widow or to create any disturbance as long as the gods and goddesses were present. She added that she knew well that Manasā was hard-hearted,<sup>2</sup> and again, when the chatra of Lakhindar was broken at the marriage, the gods and goddesses were distressed to see this inauspicious incident. Chāṇḍī explained that Manasā knew the cause of it. Then they all left the place<sup>3</sup> except Manasā, who remained to serve her own purposes.

When Behulā impressed Śiva through her dance, he promised to help her. Then she requested him to bring back the life of her husband, but he remained silent. This

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1. Ibid., p.213.
  2. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., p.186.
  3. Ibid., p. 188.

enraged Chandī, who abused Siva for being 'a naked eater of bhāṅg and dhutrā' who had forgotten his own promise to Behulā. Saying these words Chandī was about to leave, but Siva requested her to stay and asked Manasā to bring back the life of Lakhindar. Manasā answered that she was not responsible for his death. This again enraged Chandī, who abused Siva saying: "You roam in cremation grounds, dressing yourself as a madman; (I wonder) why Behulā came to you. As Padmā ruined the fortune of her own husband, how can she be sympathetic to another? You are fortunate to have a daughter like Padmā (sarcastically). If you do not bring back the life of Lakhindar you will be blamed by men as a breaker of your oath."<sup>1</sup> Chandī then left the place ignoring Siva's request to stay.

Bijay Gupta gives the longest account of this quarrel, but a similar hostile attitude is found in other versions. According to Nārāyaṇ Deb when Chandī was told by Behulā about the death of her husband, she took the matter to Siva, saying that his daughter Padmāvatī was very heartless, as she had made Behulā a widow, and urging him to explain everything to Manasā, so that she might change her attitude to the family of Chāndo. When Manasā denied the charge of causing the death of Lakhindar and expressed her desire to

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1. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., p.226.

shave the head of Behulā, saying that her husband had been bitten by the snake Kālī at her command, Chāṇḍī answered: "You are preaching too much. Who will shave the head of Behulā at your command?" Then they started quarrelling. Manasā even cast aspersions on Chāṇḍī's father. The quarrel was stopped at the intervention of Siva.<sup>1</sup> According to Ketakādās when it was proved that Manasā was guilty, Chāṇḍī severely condemned her inhuman acts before the gods.<sup>2</sup>

This hostility between Chāṇḍī and Manasā, which is continued until the very end of the story, no doubt reflects the attitude of the adherents of one goddess to those of the other. But after years of hostility the text suggests that a compromise was effected. We have already noticed that Chāṇḍo worshipped Manasā when he was told by Chāṇḍī that Manasā was identical with Bhagavatī.<sup>3</sup> Even now Manasā is worshipped in some parts of West Bengal and Assam<sup>4</sup> as one of the manifestations of Chāṇḍī. Thus the quarrel between the adherents of the two laukika deities

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1. Nārāyan Deb, op.cit., pp.126-127,130-131; Cf. Jagajjīban, op.cit., pp.305-306.
  2. Ketakadas, op.cit., pp.294-295.
  3. Supra, p. 290 . Bamsīdās, op.cit., pp.193 ff.
  4. Manasa-Kavya, p. Intro. 8.

was brought to an end by relating the divinities to each other or even by identifying them. This conflict later developed into strife between the laukika deities on one side and Śiva on the other. This stage in the assimilation of the folk divinities of Bengal is reflected very clearly in the Maṅgalkāvyas. We believe that these popular deities found <sup>great</sup> footholds in society when the Brahmanical religion was facing an alien faith after the Muslim invasion.<sup>1</sup> Against this religious background the Bengali Maṅgalkāvyas were written, partly as propagandist literature in the quarrel between the Śaivas and the worshippers of the laukika deities represented by Chāṇḍī, Manasā and Śitalā. Of course, it is clear from these kāvyas that Maṅgal Chāṇḍī was admitted into the pantheon of Hinduism earlier than Manasā. It was probably for this reason that in the story Chāṇḍo was helped by Chāṇḍī on many occasions, and agreed to worship Manasā when he was asked to do so by Chāṇḍī. Thus we may safely conclude that the quarrel between Chāṇḍī and Manasā in mediaeval literature reflects an earlier stratum of religious history than that between Śiva and Chāṇḍī or Śiva and Manasā.

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1. Infra, pp. 313-314. .

### Manasā and Śiva:

Manasā, according to the legend, was the daughter of Śiva. But it has been suggested by S.Sen that "Manasā was a co-wife of Chāṇḍī in the early form of the story. The quarrel between Manasā and Chāṇḍī and the traces of remnants of incestuous relation between the father (Śiva) and the daughter (Manasā) in the later period are indicative to their early relationship. When Śiva occupied the place of his father Dharma, his relation with Manasā was changed."<sup>1</sup> We have already concluded that the cause of the quarrel between Manasā and Chāṇḍī had nothing to do with Śiva at the time of the emergence of their cults.<sup>2</sup> And again the reference to an incestuous relationship between Śiva and Manasā does not indicate that Manasā was originally a wife of Śiva but rather the opposite. This licentious aspect of Śiva's character is clearly exposed in much mediaeval Bengali literature in general and in our kāvyas in particular. It is quite clear that the quarrel between Manasā and Chāṇḍī originated from the expansion of their respective cults, and not because of any family relationship (stepmother and stepdaughter), and that the traces of

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1. S.Sen, Bāṅglā Sāhityer Itihāsa, Vol.1, p.109. For the reference ~~to~~ Śiva's occupation of his father's place, See supra, pp. 192 - 194.
  2. Supra, pp. 298 - 306.



incestuous relations between Śiva and Manasā are simply due to Śiva's licentious character. Thus Sen's suggestion can hardly be accepted; it is not supported by any textual evidence, nor does it provide a convincing interpretation of the materials.

Relations between Manasā and Śiva are depicted as more or less cordial but the followers of Śiva, as represented by Chāṇḍo, showed a completely different attitude towards Manasā. We have already concluded that the stories reflect an early conflict between the supporters of Manasā and those of Maṅgal Chāṇḍī. On the other hand the Maṅgalkāvyas imply that the devotees of all the laukika deities who were claimed to be Śakti strongly opposed Śaivism. D.C.Sen suggests that "the propaganda of the Śākta cult however, was to restore faith in a personal divinity in the place of impersonal Śiva".<sup>1</sup> S.B.Dasgupta remarks that "the human interest of the life long struggle of Cand Sadagar of the Manasāmaṅgals has been minimised by the undercurrent of the religious tone - by the fact that it really represents the struggle of decaying Śaivism of Bengal against the growth and spread of Śāktaism represented by the Manasā cult."<sup>2</sup> T.W.Clark interprets the evidence as

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1. D.C.Sen, H.B.L.L., p.254.

2. S.B.Dasgupta, Obscure Religious Cults, Intro., p.xxif. The same scholar writes: "...among the Hindu deities Śiva enjoyed wide popularity in the early and mediaeval period." (op.cit., Intro.p.XLIII ff.)

indicating that "the struggle depicted in the maṅgalkāvya between the devotees of Śiva and those of Manasā or Chāṇḍī derives not from the rivalry between the philosophies of Śaivism and Śāktaism, but from a clash between farming people and semi-nomadic tribes, who had encroached on cultivated land, a clash which naturally involved the deities they worshipped."<sup>1</sup> The view of D.C.Sen cannot stand, as we have already seen that Śiva was worshipped in Bengal as a personal deity from the early Pāla period.<sup>2</sup> So the Śākta cult cannot be interpreted as a restoration of faith in a personal divinity as opposed to the impersonal Śiva. Dasgupta's interpretation does not wholly satisfy us, for there is no evidence that Śaivism had decayed in our period in Bengal.<sup>3</sup>

T.W.Clark's suggestion is not supported by textual evidence.<sup>4</sup> This scholar holds the view that there was an early conflict between the worshippers of Śiva as a krishakadevatā and those of Manasā and Chāṇḍī. He thinks that the worshippers of Śiva were settled people who maintained themselves by cultivation, whereas the adherents

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1. B.S.O.A.S., 1955, XVII/3, p. 506.

2. Supra, pp. 89-95.

3. Supra, pp. 89-95.

4. This opinion was expressed by Mr. Clark when I personally discussed the matter with him.

of Manasā and Chandī were semi-nomadic people. When these tried to settle by occupying land, a clash arose between them and the settled people of the farming class, which was expressed in tradition as a quarrel their respective deities. However, we are told in the Chandī-māṅgalkāvyas that the hunter Kāṅketu, a member of a tribal caste, was given wealth by the goddess Chandī. With this wealth he founded a city in Gujrat<sup>1</sup> after cutting down the forests. But he was worried as people did not come to settle in his domain. So he prayed to the goddess Chandī, who directly helped him by flooding the country of Kalinga<sup>2</sup> sparing the newly founded domain of Kāṅketu. Kāṅketu promised to give certain facilities of cultivation to immigrants, who came in large numbers. Here we should remember that he is never mentioned as encroaching on cultivated lands; he and his subjects only attempted to cultivate uncultivated waste. This incident suggests three probabilities: firstly, in those days agrarian economy was expanding in Bengal; secondly, on the basis of land economy low class people were challenging the authority of the existing social order and claiming a higher place in

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1 & 2. Gujrat and Kalinga - these two names are not to be confused with the historical places in Western India and modern Orissa respectively. They are two fictitious places located in Rārha. (See S.B.Dasgupta, Bhārater Śakti-Sādhana O Śaktā Sāhitya, p. 181).

society, supported in their efforts by the local deities; and lastly, the central authority was very weak, leading to the growth and rise of many small principalities. Of course Clark is right enough in his suggestion that the quarrel between Saivism and Śāktism reflected in our kāvyas was not based on mere philosophical differences. But the hypothesis of the encroachment on cultivated lands by semi-nomadic tribes is supported neither by historical nor by textual evidence of our period. Thus the suggestion that the quarrel between Saivism and Śāktism arose from the conflict of the economic interests of farming people and semi-nomadic tribes can hardly be accepted.

We have already seen that the popular deities, many of which had their origin in the 9th-12th centuries A.D., found footholds in orthodox society only after the Muslim invasion. A careful study of the maṅgalkāvyas suggests that these local deities were accepted and worshipped by the upper classes for two reasons. Their adherents propagated the belief that a devotee of one of the popular goddesses was always blessed with enormous wealth and prosperity. But they were not satisfied with this type of propaganda only. They also advanced their cause by depicting the endless power of their goddesses in relation

to the predominating deity of that period - Śiva. Naturally the worshippers of the Purāṇic Śiva opposed the propaganda in favour of the goddesses, who were referred to by them as witches. But their opposition was almost powerless against the rise of the goddesses. To make them popular among the upper classes their adherents related them to the predominant god. Thus Manasā and Chāṇḍī became a daughter and a wife of Śiva respectively.

A similar attempt was carried on in South India. H. Whitehead observes that "...there has been a strong tendency in the Tamil country, where Brahmin influence is strong, to connect the old village deities with the Hindu Pantheon, and especially with the God Śiva, the most popular deity in South India."<sup>1</sup>

Next the evolution of the cults was accelerated by the growth of the vernacular literature. It seems more probable that the quarrel between Śaivism and Śākṭism as depicted in the maṅgalkāvyas arose when the worshippers of the goddesses propagated the belief that a devotee of their sect would be blessed with any boon desired by him if he merely worshipped the goddess in a very simple way. This preaching appealed to the common folk of the country and the

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1. H.Whitehead, op.cit., p.133.

country and the number of worshippers increased rapidly, enlisting the people of the upper classes - - particularly the womenfolk. Thus the propagation of the idea of the unlimited power of the goddesses Chāṇḍī and Manasā naturally tended to undermine the power of the predominating Śiva, leading to a quarrel with the worshippers of the latter, represented by Dhanapati and Chāṇḍo of the Chāṇḍī and Manasā kāvya respectively.

Possible political causes of the popularity of these deities cannot be ignored. The Muslims dethroned the Senas and finally brought disaster to the older ruling classes. This might be expected to lower the prestige of the latter's patron deities, such as Śiva and Viṣṇu. During this time of political insecurity and chaos it may well be that the common people thought that the ruling classes and their deities were incapable of protecting them, so they lost their faith in both. On this political background the laukika deities became popular and a literature grew up to propagate their enormous power in comparison with that of the classical deities of the upper classes. Such a development must have satisfied the needs and tastes of the society of the time. This political influence on the growth of the laukika cults is indicated by the fact that after the Sena king left Rāḍha his dynasty continued to rule

in East Bengal for many years. All our evidence indicates that the new deities began to be worshipped and praised in Rāḍha, the region which first came under the sway of Muslim rulers. And it was in Rāḍha that the stories of these deities first took literary form. Thus the inability of the rulers to protect their subjects made them and their deities unpopular among the commons and helped the laukika deities to become popular.

Let us now examine the speeches of Śiva and Manasā, as related in our kāvyas. At the request of Manasā Śiva blessed her saying: "She will be worshipped by Devas, Asuras and earthly men and there will be twelve festivals (in her honour), one in each month".<sup>1</sup> However, Manasā's clash arose with Chāndo when she was already being worshipped by ~~Sana~~kā. Humiliated by Chāndo, Manasā went to Śiva and told her story. In reply Śiva told her that she might kill the sons of Chāndo but not Chāndo himself.<sup>2</sup> Bijay Gupta adds: "Do not ask me to kill Chāndo. If Chāndo worships you, you will be worshipped by (other) earthly

1. Ketakādās, opcit., p.134.

kariba tomār pūjā devāsūr nar //  
bāra parbba haiba tomār bāramāse

2. Nārāyaṇ Deb, op.cit., p.67.

men".<sup>1</sup> Similar instructions to save the life of Chāndo were given by Śiva when Manasā begged permission to sink his boats.<sup>2</sup> Here Vijayagupta differs and states that Śiva became very angry and began to abuse both Manasā and Chāndo, who were quarrelling blindly with each other, saying: "Either you die or Chāndo dies, as I cannot bear these troubles any more. I think I shall leave the family for good."<sup>3</sup> Then Manasā told him of the insults she had suffered at the hands of Chāndo. At the complaint of Manasā Śiva was all the more irritated and said: "You Padmā, go away from here. Either Chāndo may kill you or you may kill him. The one who is more powerful may kill the other. Both of you can quarrel just as you like."<sup>4</sup> This reply helped Manasā to achieve her purpose. Similarly she was able to take away the snake Udayakāla from Śiva to kill Dhanvantari. It was Śiva who gave Manasā in marriage to the sage Jaratkāru. On the other hand Śiva was brought back to consciousness by Manasā when he became unconscious after drinking the poison. Finally it was Śiva's request to Manasā which helped Behulā to get back the life of her husband. Thus

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1. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., p.66.

chāndare mārīte nā bala henabānī //  
 chāndo yaditomā pūjā kare ekchite //  
 tabe se tomār pūjā habe prithibīte //

2. Nārāyaṇ Dey, op.cit., p.192.

3. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., p.135.

4. Ibid.



in our kāvyaś the relations between Śiva and Manasā are more cordial than those between Chāṇḍī and Manasā.

### Dharma and Manasā:

The earlier form of the story of Manasā is believed by S.Sen to have been associated with the legend of Dharma Thākur.<sup>1</sup> Before we examine this theory, we should consider the characteristic features of the god Dharma. After a careful study of the cult, S.B.Dasgupta concludes that "the Dharma thākur does not represent the conception of any particular deity, -- he rather represents the general idea of Godhead or of the sovereign deity over the universe, and as such he has been associated consciously with all the conceptions of Godhead or of the sovereign deity popularly current in Bengal and Orissa from the tenth century A.D."<sup>2</sup> And again "the origin of the Dharma thākur with all his positive and negative, Buddhistic and Hindu attributes may historically be associated with the conception of this Lord Supreme of the later Buddhistic schools".<sup>3</sup> In Bengal a literature grew up to propagate the power of this deity. Important for our purpose is the story of creation as depicted

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1. S.Sen, Bāṅglā Sāhityer Itihāś, p.109.
  2. S.B.Dasgupta, Obscure Religious Cults, p.327.
  3. Ibid., pp. 316 f.

vividly in the Dharma literature in particular, and briefly in other maṅgalkāvyas in general. This is as follows:-<sup>1</sup>

Before the creation of the Universe there was the void only. The first step towards creation was the appearance of wind, from which a bubble came into existence. From the latter came Dharma, the formless one, and out of the broken bubble water poured all over the Universe. The god Dharma floated on it. After fourteen yugas he yawned and gave a long sigh, out of which an Owl was born. Riding on the Owl he toured the universe, and finally both of them thought of rest. On the advice of the Owl, Dharma threw his sacred thread on the water, from which came forth the Nāga Vāsuki with a hundred heads. Vāsuki immediately wanted to eat both Dharma and the Owl. Then Dharma threw his ear-rings on the water; out of these four frogs were born, and were eaten by Vāsuki, who was satisfied with this meal. Then Dharma scraped off a bit of dirt from his body and dropped it on the head of Vāsuki. There the dirt came to life as Vasumatī (the earth) and began to grow, finally taking a triangular shape. Then Dharma and his Vāhana and advisor the Owl alighted on the earth to take

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1. Rāmāi Paṇḍit: Sūnya Purāṇa, (Ed.by) N.N.Vasu, pp.1-22.

rest. Dharma's sweat fell on the ground and out of it Ādyā Śakti (Primal Energy) was born. She is also known as Ketakā.<sup>1</sup> Then the primeval mother introduced herself to Dharma and the Owl, and called them father and uncle respectively.

Dharma then created the river Ballukā where, accompanied by the Owl, he went to practise penance, leaving the Ādyā Śakti alone. As he continued his penance, Ādyā Śakti attained puberty and was very eager to see her father and uncle. Out of her passionate thoughts and feelings came Desire (Kāma). She ordered Desire to disturb Dharma in his meditations. Dharma was erotically aroused by Desire and his semen was spilled on the ground. When Dharma enquired from the Owl about the cause of Desire's attack on him, he explained that Desire was commissioned by Ādyā Śakti as she was then under the control of the Love-god. The semen was collected in an earthen pot by the Owl and the two returned to Ādyā taking the pot with them. Dharma consoled her and, again accompanied by the Owl,<sup>2</sup> went out to search for a bridegroom for her. Before they went, the Owl left the pot with Ādyā, telling her to

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1. This name does not occur in the Sūnya Purāṇa version, where Ādyā Śakti is also referred to as Gaurī and Pārvati. For the name Ketakā, see S.Sen's Bāṅglā Sāhityer Itihās, vol.I, p.109, and his other works.
  2. According to some versions Dharma married Ādyā and then left her to do penance as before (see, S.Sen, op.cit., vol.I, p.502).

guard it well, as it contained poisonous honey (Visha-madhu).

Time passed and Dharma did not return. In the meantime Ādyā felt the wounds of the Love-god so deeply that she drank what she thought to be poison in order to end her life. But the result was completely different and she became pregnant. In due time she gave birth to three children - - Brahmā, Vishṇu, and Śiva. Thus Ādyā became the wife of Dharma. After their birth Brahmā, Vishṇu and Śiva left home to practice austerities on the bank of the river Ballukā. Meanwhile Dharma was informed by the Owl of the birth of the three gods and their going to the Ballukā. But Dharma did not want to show himself to his sons, so he decided to test their supernatural power.<sup>1</sup> Śiva, who proved to possess higher meditative qualities than his two brothers, was instructed by Dharma that Ādyā should be his wife throughout all the ages, and so Śiva married her. Then Dharma entrusted the charge of creation to Brahmā, Vishṇu, Śiva and Ādyā, and finally died.

This cosmogony differs widely from the version of the 17th century poet Jagajjīban.<sup>2</sup> He tells that Dharma first

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1. Supra, pp.192-193.

2. Jagajjīban,op.cit., pp.1-20.

created Brahmā, Vishṇu and Śiva, who later went out to practise austerities on the bank of the river, leaving their father Dharma alone. Dharma badly felt the absence of his sons and sighed sadly. Out of his sigh a hermaphrodite emerged, whom the god changed into a beautiful girl, and whom he called Manasā. When she attained puberty Dharma himself fell in love with his daughter's beauty. Finally he married Manasā with the approval of his three sons. After sexual intercourse between father and daughter, the latter slept very deeply and the father repented of his actions. He was so distressed by guilt that he left the house with the intention of ending his life. Before he committed suicide, he decided to put his sons to the test as in the earlier form of the legend. In the test Śiva proved superior. Then Dharma expressed his desire to enter into Śiva and told him that Manasā would be his wife.<sup>1</sup> Śiva let him enter him by his mouth. On the other hand when Manasā woke up and did not find Dharma by her side, she was restless, until she heard from Śiva about the death of Dharma. She asked Śiva, Vishṇu and Brahmā to make a funeral pyre and threw herself upon it. She became a female baby of three days old, crying on the pyre. She was taken out,

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1. Jagajjīban, op.cit., p.12f.

mukhmela satbare udare deha bās /  
 X X X  
 manasā kamini habe tomār gharanī //

put into an iron box, and set adrift on the river by the joint consent of the three sons of Dharma. This iron box came into the possession of the sage Hemanta, with whom the girl grew up, bearing the name Durgā. She finally married Śiva.

The birth of Manasā from the breath of Dharma and her marriage with Dharma are peculiar to this version. Later in the same text Jagajjīban tells of the traditional story of the birth of Manasā from the semen of Śiva and her marriage with Jaratkāru. Though there is no mention of the birth of Manasā from Dharma and their marriage in the early versions of the Manasā story, we cannot altogether ignore these peculiar legends. Many traces in our older versions suggest that the early form of the story had a certain connection with the Dharma legend. In the version of Bipradās it is said that Śiva practised austerities in order to behold Dharma, and was instructed by Dharma through the medium of Gangā to go to Kālidaha and pluck flowers, for there he would see Dharma's manifestation in the guise of a girl.<sup>1</sup> According to Nārāyaṇ Deb, when Śiva ordered Viśvakarmā to make a flower-basket in which to carry Manasā, he said; "O Viśvakarmā! Make a basket for me, as I want to carry Anādi Dharma (in it)".<sup>2</sup> These two references

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1. Bipradās, op.cit., pp. 5-7.

2. Nārāyaṇ Deb, op.cit., p.22.

suggest an early and close relationship between Dharma and Manasā. Here Manasā appears as the Śakti of Dharma, identical with the Ādyā Śakti, the primeval mother of the Dharma literature. The close relationship of Dharma and Manasā can be further proved from the statements that "Padmāvatī appeared as the manifestation of Dharma", and<sup>1</sup> that she was also the incarnation of Dharma Nirañjan. Thus the story of the birth of the goddess from Dharma and their marriage depicted in the version of Jagajjīban seem to have originated in an age when the Dharma cult was very popular in Bengal, and the story of the creation of the universe by the same god was widely accepted. The popularity of the Dharma cult can be further proved by the facts that the creation of the universe by this god is depicted by the poets of the Manasā and Chāṇḍī kāvyas,<sup>2</sup> and that down to the present day the Dharma Thākur is worshipped throughout West Bengal accompanied by either Chāṇḍī or Manasā.<sup>3</sup>

When Manasā sought a foothold in society, her adherents, including the poets, identified her with the Ādyā Śakti.

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1. Bipradās, op.cit., pp.228,13.
  2. S.Sen, Bāṅglā Sahityer Itihās, vol.1, p.109.
  3. V.Ghose, Paścimbāṅger Samskr̥iti, p.274.

This view is supported by the evidence of our texts, where the goddess is referred to as ādimātā, jagatmātā, viśvajananī, and ādyā-śakti.<sup>1</sup> The use of these epithets strongly suggests the general tendency of the poets to make the deity the supreme one. She is referred to as the daughter and the wife of Dharma by the 17th century poet Jagajjīban.<sup>2</sup> In the village of Iswarpore, Birbhum, at the worship of Dharma Thākur, popularly known as Sundara Rāy, the songs of Manasā are recited, as the goddess is present in the same shrine. These songs form the most important and noteworthy feature of this festival.<sup>3</sup> Similarly in a Dharma shrine in the village of Jhunka Bankura, an ancient Jaina image placed by the side of the image of Dharma Thākur is believed to be the image of Manasā, and occasionally she is offered a pig by the Bauris on the last day of Srāvaṇa.<sup>4</sup> It is further reported that

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1. Bipradās, op.cit., p.230; Bijay Gupta, op.cit., p.246; Ketakādās, op.cit., p.335.
  2. It is interesting to note that "the Dharma Thākur of the Dharma cult is not generally associated with any Śakti or female counterpart. In the Dharma-pūjā, however, we find a goddess, Kāmīnyā by name, whose worship follows the worship of Dharma along with the worship of many other gods and goddesses, and she is the goddess for removing blindness and leprosy. This Kāmīnyā is sometimes described as something like a Śakti of Dharma, and as a matter of fact some of her descriptions resemble the description of the goddess variously described in the Buddhists and the Hindu Tantras." (S.B.Dasgupta, Obscure Religious Cult, pp.320-321). This statement is strictly accurate, but it should be noted that Chāṇḍī or Manasā are still often worshipped with Dharma, though not as his Śaktis.
  3. V.Ghose, Paśchimbāṅger Samskr̥iti, p.186.
  4. Folklore, vol.1, No.4, 1960, p.239.



the Dharma Thākur is rarely seen without Manasā in his shrine.<sup>1</sup> The association is not confined in West Bengal. In Kamrup, Assam, an earthen pot containing water is used at the worship of Manasā. This pot which is popularly known as the pot of Dharma, contains river or pond water which has been used at the time of the worship of the god Nārāyaṇa. The mantras of Manasā include a hymn to Dharma, in which he is said to be identical with Viṣṇu. The sacred water of Dharma-Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu) is used to bathe the symbol of Manasā. In the district of Mangaldai Manasā is worshipped together with other divinities, especially with Dharma. This Dharma-Nārāyaṇa of white complexion is offered a pair of white pigeons. Songs are recited at the worship of this god which are similar to the songs of the Dharmamangal, kāvyas of Bengal. In the Assamese version of the Manasā kāvya frequent reference to Dharma (Thākur) is made. This evidence suggests that this Dharma is none but the popular Dharma Thākur of Bengal. It is believed by scholars that, possibly owing to unfavourable conditions, the cult of this local god was concealed in that of Manasā.<sup>3</sup> The early 18th century poet Sitārām Dās refers to the worship of Dharma by Manasā, as we have noticed in

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1. V.Ghose, Paśchimbaṅger Saṃskṛiti, p.674.

2. Manasā-Kāvya, Intro., p.12.

3. Ibid., p.13.

the case of Śiva, on the bank of Balluka.<sup>1</sup> These references to the association of Dharma and Manasā strongly suggest an early relationship between the two deities. Moreover one of the names by which the goddess Manasā is referred to is Ketakā<sup>2</sup> which also refers, as we have already seen, to the Ādyā Śakti. To explain the origin of this name, the poet states that as the goddess originated in the screwpine leaf, she is called Ketukā-sundarī. Dr. S.Sen<sup>3</sup> suggests that "Ketakā is perhaps connected with Vedic keta 'desire, will', a synonym of manas". But the scholar does not follow up this suggestion, and we are not inclined to derive this name from an obscure Vedic word. Whatever its origin, it seems that there was some early relationship between Dharma and Manasā.

A further process in the assimilation of the cult of Manasā with the cults of the upper class deities was carried on by the adherents of both. Manasā, who is the daughter of Śiva at the beginning of the kāvyas, is referred to in two cases as Maheśvari, the consort of Śiva, at their end.<sup>4</sup>

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1. Bipradās, op.cit., Intro. p.xvi.
  2. Ketakādās, op.cit., p.6. The poet calls himself the servant (dāsa) of Ketakā (Manasā) and hence he is known as Ketakādās.
  3. Bipradās, op.cit., Intro. p.xxxii.
  4. Ketakādās, op.cit., p.335; Jagajjīban, op.cit., p.330.

This implies a further rise in her status. Probably the former relationship was put forward by the adherents of Manasā, and the latter by the Brahmanic scholars who accepted the goddess into their fold.

From the above evidence it is clear that the relationship between Dharma and Manasā originated in an age and an era when the Dharma cult was widely popular in Bengal.<sup>1</sup> The same school of thought sought to prove that Brahmā, Vishnu and Śiva were the sons of Dharma. The origin of all these relationships seems to have been the product of the desire to obtain a place for the popular divinities Manasā and Dharma in the theology of the local Brahmanism, which was patronised by upper class society.

#### Manasā and Gaṅgā:

It might be expected that Manasā would become in some way associated with the river goddess Gaṅgā, for the latter is also closely associated with the nāgas or serpent spirits of Indian mythology. The worship of the nāgas as water spirits may be traced back to a very early period.<sup>2</sup> A few river goddesses, such as Sarasvatī, Gaṅgā and Yamunā,

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1. It is stated by S.Sen that Dharma was once worshipped as the village deity throughout Eastern and Northern India. (S.Sen, History of Bengali Literature, pp.54-55).
  2. W.Crooke, The Popular Religion and Folklore of Northern India, vol.1. pp.42-43; V.S.Smith, History of Fine Art in India and Ceylon, p.138; Benjamin Rowland, op.cit., p.26; Bipradas, op.cit., Intro.p.xxxviii.

have been worshipped from Vedic times. As the nāgas are believed to guard all kinds of open water, such as tanks, rivers and lakes, their association with the river goddess Gaṅgā is quite understandable. The worship of Gaṅgā as an independent cult from the 10th century A.D. in Bengal has been proved by the discoveries of icons. She is found in the company of nāga and nāginī figures.<sup>1</sup>

In an early rock sculpture of Māmāllapuram near Madras we find "a whole world of animals, ascetics, genii, and gods round the cascade in which sports a band of male and female serpent deities (nāgas and nāgīs), symbolic of the sacred waters." This sculpture is now identified as the "descent of the Gaṅgā (Gaṅgāvatarana)" against the earlier interpretation of it as the "penance of Arjuna".<sup>2</sup> This sculptural evidence suggests firstly, the association of the nāgas with the water cult as well as with its deities, and, secondly, the popularity of the nāga cult, which is also attested by much other evidence. Probably even before the origin of the different river goddesses, the people of India worshipped the nāgas as water spirits, or rather as the controllers and givers of rain and water as we have stated elsewhere.<sup>3</sup> And when these goddesses took

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1. History of Bengal, pp. 461 ff.

2. René Grousset, The Civilization of the East, pp. 228-230 and plates.

3. Supra, pp. 61-64.

their birth, some association with the nāgas might be expected.

In our kāvyas Gaṅgā appears as one of the two wives of Śiva, and thus she is the stepmother of Manasā. When Chāṇḍī beat Manasā at their first meeting, the latter begged help from Gaṅgā. Gaṅgā interfered and blamed Chāṇḍī for her treatment of Manasā. This led to a quarrel between Gaṅgā and Chāṇḍī and finally the former left the place.<sup>1</sup> Throughout the various versions of the legend Gaṅgā is sympathetic towards Manasā as well as towards her antagonists, the family of Chāṇḍo. But in certain cases Gaṅgā is forced to act in favour of Manasā, through the threats of the latter. It is said in the version of Vijayagupta that Manasā deposited the corpses of the six sons of Chāṇḍo with Gaṅgā, with the instructions to take them back when required. The same poet continues that when Manasā asked the help of Gaṅgā in her plan to sink the boats of Chāṇḍo at Kālīdaha, Gaṅgā refused, as the boats were then guarded by Durgā herself. But Manasā was very angry and told her that, if she did not help her, she would take revenge by vomiting poison on the water of the Ganges so that none would drink it any more, leading to the

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1. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., pp. 18-19.

unpopularity of its goddess.<sup>1</sup> This problem was temporarily averted by Gaṅgā, who advised Manasā to take help from Śiva and Durgā. After returning from them Manasā again asked Gaṅgā's help, but this time also she refused, and was told that it would be an act of ungratefulness if she helped Manasā, as Chāndo was her devotee. Chāndo had worshipped Gaṅgā with various rites for a happy journey when he set sail for a trading voyage to Pātan. He also worshipped her when he encountered an exceptionally high tide at Kāṅkākrārdaha.<sup>2</sup> The reply aroused greater anger in Manasā, who was prepared to carry out her threat and vomit poison into the river Ganges. The terrified Gaṅgā then agreed to do her bidding, and finally Chāndo's boats were sunk at Kālidaha. Manasā deposited all the boats with their cargos and crews with Gaṅgā. All the dead bodies and boats were finally taken back from Gaṅgā and restored to life at Behulā's request. Thus the relations between Gaṅgā and Manasā were more cordial than those between Chāndī and Manasā.

However, Gaṅgā is shown in our kāvyas as one of the goddesses of right and justice. The sympathy of Gaṅgā for the family of Chāndo can be seen from a folk tale, related to the story of Behulā and Lakhindar, current in North

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1. Ibid., pp.100,134.

2. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., p.141; Jagajjīban, op.cit., p.128,143. It is still customary in India to worship Gaṅgā in order to avoid any catastrophe during a boat journey.

Bengal and North Bihar. Manasā commissioned the most poisonous snake Dhorhā to bite Lakhindar in the sealed chamber. On the way, when the snake was crossing the river Ganges, the Goddess Gaṅgā came to know the purpose of its journey. She took pity on the family of Chāndo, and on Lakhindar in particular, and made an attempt to save him by creating illusory fish in the river to attract the greedy snake. The purpose was served and the snake chased the fish but could not catch them, and finally came to the shore completely disappointed. Before chasing the fish, he had placed all his poison on a screwpine leaf. This was eaten by a wasp, a poisonous ant, a scorpion and a hornet, which are believed to be poisonous for this reason. Since then the Dhorhā snake has been non-poisonous.<sup>1</sup>

We have already seen<sup>2</sup> that while extolling the power of the goddess Manasā, the ojhā Dhanvantari instructed Sanakā to bathe in the river Ganges, uttering "Mānasāi Māi", in order to achieve any purpose. Finally Sanakā was blessed with the boon that she would become the mother of six sons by the grace of the goddess Gaṅgā. This episode again suggest the friendly relationship of Manasā and Gaṅgā. This relationship is evident from the fact that Manasā worship is referred to in the early version as

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1. A. Bhattacharya, Bāṅglār Lokā Sāhitya, pp. 570-571.

2. Supra, ch. 111 (Assam, p. 124.) pp. 195-196.

taking place on the Daśaharā - a prescribed day when the river Ganges is ceremonially worshipped. Down to the present time both the river Ganges and Manasā are worshipped on the same day.<sup>1</sup>

Our brief survey of the relations of Manasā with the other important and popular cult-divinities of mediaeval Bengal shows how a local divinity became by the 15th century A.D. a goddess universally accepted among all classes of people, not only in her place of origin but possibly also in a wider area, comprising the whole of Bengal, Assam and Bihar.

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1. Infra, pp. 386 f.



## CHAPTER VII

The Iconography and Heredity  
of Manasā

An attempt is made <sup>here</sup> to examine the image hypothetically identified as Manasā and to consider the view that the conceptions of different deities have been embodied in her. The images in question have long been identified and mentioned in the catalogues of Museums as representing the popular snake goddess Manasā. Most of them were discovered as a result of the excavations.

The images may be classified broadly in two categories according to the number of their arms. We describe typical examples of each category in chronological order.

A. Four-armed images:

(I) A goddess of grey sandstone seated in the sukhāsana (Plate 1). Emblems are indistinct. Her head is covered by a snake canopy. 9th century A.D.<sup>1</sup>

(II) The goddess is seated in the baddha-padmāsana on a double petalled lotus issuing out of an ornamented pot (Plate 2).

On either side of the pot is carved a Nāga couple with their

1. Catalogue of V.R.S., p.29, No. H(e)4; For date Supplementary

List supplied from V.R.S.M., on 16.3.61 by D.K.Chakrabarti, Asst. Curator.

hands folded. The goddess is sheltered by a canopy of seven snake hoods. She wears kañkanas, bāhubalas, hāra, upavīta, katibandha, katisūtra and patrakunḍalas. Her upper right and left hands hold a snake and a pot respectively and the lower ones rosary and a manuscript respectively. To the extreme left on the pedestal is carved a row of five Nāgas under a single snake hood, with their hands in the añjali pose, one above the other in a vertical line (under a Siva linga as identified by V.R.S.M). On the proper right only the lowermost Nāga and a part of that immediately above it survive. 11th century A.D.<sup>1</sup>

(III) The goddess is seated in the vajraparyāṅkāśana (Plate 3). There is a canopy of seven snake hoods over her head. Her upper right and left hands hold a manuscript and a pot respectively, the lower right holds a rosary and the left is in the posture of granting a wish (varada mudrā). On the right and left on the pedestal a linga and a figure of Gaṇeśa are carved respectively. There is a large pot in front of the pedestal, out of which two snakes emerge, each crawling off in opposite directions (Undated).<sup>2</sup>

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1. History of Bengal, Vol. 1, p.460 and Plate LXVII.161; Supp. List, V. R.S.M. No.800.
  2. T.Bloch, Supp.Catalogue, Indian Museum, p.95; Bhattasali, op. cit., p.219 and Plate LXXII; R.D.Banerjee, Eastern Indian School of Mediaeval Sculpture, p.122 and Plate LXIV(c)

An almost similar four-armed image has been preserved in the village Serpur in the district of Bogra, Bengal.<sup>1</sup>

The difference is the absence of the large pot and the presence of a huge head<sup>2</sup> on the pedestal and a Nāga couple on either side of this head, with their legs bent at the knee.

(IV) The goddess is seated in the padmāsana (Plate 4). A canopy of nine snake hoods is over her head. Each of the upper hands contains a long leafy branch and the lower right and left hands hold a fruit(?) and a child on the lap respectively (undated).<sup>3</sup>

(V) The goddess is seated on a lotus with the right leg pendant. A canopy of seven snake hoods is over her head. Each of the upper hands holds a long leafy branch and the lower right and left hold a snake and a child in the lap respectively (11th century A.D.).<sup>4</sup>

#### B. Two-armed goddess:

(I) The goddess is seated in the sukhāsana on a lotus throne (Plate 5). There is a pot below the seat, out of which emerge a pair of snakes. Below the extreme right and left on the

1. S.P.P.R., Vol.VI, 1st issue, 1318 B.E., p.10.

2. We have not seen an illustration of this image. The nature of the head is not described.

3. Monograph V.R.S., 1930, No.4. p.30 and Fig.2; R.D.Banerjee, op.cit., p.122 and Plate LXIV(a); History of Bengal, Vol.1, p.460 and footnote.

4. M.A.S.I., No.55, pp.23,88 and Plate XXXVIII g; History of Bengal, p.460 and footnote.

pedestal there is a kneeling worshipper on either side. On either side of the main figure there is a seated male figure, possibly a dvārapāla with jaṭā-mukuta. On either side of the canopy there is a therio-anthropomorphic Nāga; each bears a garland, that on the right in his left hand, and that on the left in his right. The goddess holds a lotus bud in her right hand in the varada ~~pose~~ and her left hand holds a snake. She has a canopy of seven snake hoods (10th century A.D.).<sup>1</sup> The Asutosh Museum, University of Calcutta, possesses an almost identical image of the same period, with the omission of the figures on either side of the canopy.<sup>2</sup>

(II) The goddess is seated at ease on a lotus seat (Plate 6). On either side is a male attendant - the right one wears a crown, and the left a jaṭā-mukuta. Above these attendants four snakes are carved one above the other, in a vertical line on each side. On the extreme right and left there is a figure of a vidyādhara and between them a Śiva liṅga hangs from the raised border. On the pedestal there is a pot in the centre and on its right and left are found the figure of a man and a naivedya respectively. The goddess has a canopy

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1. Catalogue V.R.S., p.29, No. H(e)3; Supp. List V.R.S.M., No.66.

2. Nārāyaṇ Deb. op.cit., Plate.

of seven snake hoods. She holds a snake on her left hand and her right hand is in varada pose (11th century A.D.).<sup>1</sup>

(III) The Indian Museum contains an image of the goddess, seated in the lalitāsana pose under a canopy of seven snake hoods (Plate 7). Her right and left hands hold a long leafy branch and a child on her lap respectively (early Pāla period).<sup>2</sup>

(IV) The British Museum possesses a very beautiful bronze specimen of elaborate design (Plate 8). The goddess is seated in the sukhāsana under a canopy of seven snake hoods, with a lāḍḍukā(?) in her open palm of the left and her right hand holding a short staff or gadā. To the extreme right and left on the pedestal are carved on each side two standing Nāginīs in añjali pose with a single snake hood. Rising immediately from the central pedestal there are two lotus buds with long stalks, and above the left one is the figure of a dog or a small animal walking towards the goddess. On either side of the goddess there is a seated male figure, probably a dvārapāla, who wears ratnahāra, yajñopavīta, kaṭivastra, kaṭisūtra and bāhubalas on his arms. On either side of the snake canopy is a hamsa (11th century A.D.).<sup>3</sup>

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1. Supp.List, V.R.S.M., No.485.

2. A.R.A.S.I., 1934 - 1935, p.80 and Plate XXIV(b); History of Bengal, p.460 and Plate LXVI. 159.

3. British Museum, Indian Sculpture Section.

(V) The goddess is seated in the sukhāsana on a lotus throne under a canopy of seven snake hoods. (Plate 9). She holds a child on her left thigh with the left arm and a snake in her right hand. On the left below the pedestal there are a few figures in añjali pose (undated).<sup>1</sup>

(VI) The goddess is seated on a lotus in the lalitāsana under a snake hood. Her right and left hands hold a fruit in varada and a child on her lap respectively. Her two arms are encircled by a snake on either side. A small indistinct figure is carved below on the back of the central figure.<sup>2</sup>

(VII) The goddess is an unusual standing figure (Plate 10). On the pedestal is carved a figure of an elephant which is apparently the vāhana or mount of the goddess. She is attended by a standing female figure on each side. Above the extreme right is seen a reclining therio-anthropomorphic Nāga figure, but the sculpture on the left is not visible. The number of snakes forming the canopy of the goddess cannot be counted with certainty, but a snake hood is clearly evident. The attributes of the hands are not distinct (undated).<sup>3</sup>

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1. N.N.Vasu, The Archaeological Survey of Mayurbhanja, Intro. p. XXXVIII and Fig. 15.
  2. Journal of the Assam Research Society, Vol. VIII, pp.13-16; P.C. Chaudhury, Early History of Assam, p.498.
  3. N.K.Bhattachali, op.cit., p.220(footnote) and Plate LXXIII(b); B.K. Barua, A Cultural History of Assam, Vol.1, p.194 and Plate 73; P.C. Chaudhury, op.cit., p.498.

(VIII) Two specimens of the image of the goddess with a third eye on forehead have been unearthed. Both the images correspond to each other, but that of Marail in the district of Dinajpur bears an inscription on the pedestal. This and the uninscribed image found at the village Banshihari of the same district have been dated to the 10th-11th century and the 13th century A.D. respectively. The goddess of the latter place is seated in the lalitāsana with a canopy of seven snake hoods (Plate 11). The left hand holds a snake and the right is in varada-mudrā. On either side is a male attendant - the right one wears a crown and the left a jaṭā-mukuta. On either side of the canopy there is a therio-anthropomorphic Nāga who bears a garland. There is also a pot on the pedestal.<sup>1</sup>

(IX) The goddess is seated in the lalitāsana or lalitākshēpa pose on a double-petalled lotus under a canopy of seven snake hoods (Plate 12). She holds a snake in her left hand and the object in her right is indistinct. The peculiarity of this image is the sarpa-kuchabandha (breast-band formed by snakes). There is a pot on the pedestal from which two snakes are crawling. On either side of the goddess is a male

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1. J.A.S.B. Vol.XXVIII(New Series), pp.178, 181 and Plate 6, Fig., 3; History of Bengal, p.460.

attendant (undated).<sup>1</sup>

It is to be noted that almost all the images are adorned with the ornaments similar to those of the image described as no.II (four armed), above.<sup>2</sup>

Thus almost similar images of the snake goddess, dating from the 9th century to the 13th century A.D., have been discovered throughout Eastern India.<sup>3</sup> Scholars who have identified these as Manasā have failed to give reasons for this identification. We have not been able to establish who first identified these images as such. However a number of arguments may be put forward in favour of the identification.

The dhyānas now current at the worship of Manasā and their descriptions in the Sāstra literature conform to the images in some respects. When an image is not inscribed, the dhyānas greatly help to identify it. A dhyāna gives a description of the image concerned, the number of hands and their attributes, the ornaments, the vāhana, and other characteristic features.

Throughout West Bengal, the following three dhyānas are employed in the worship of Manasā.

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1. A.R.A.S.I., 1921-1922, p.78 and Plate XXVIII(c); J.N.Banerjea, op.cit., p.351; R.D.Banerji, op.cit., p.122 and Plate LXIV(b).
  2. Supra, p.333
  3. See Illustrations where the names of the places of the discovery of the images are given.



(A) devīmambāmahīnām śaśadharavadanām chārūkāntīm vadānyām  
 haṃsārūḍhāmudārāmaruṇitavasanām sarvadām sarvadaiva /  
 smerāsyām maṇḍitāṅgīm kanakamaṇiganairnāgaratnairanekair  
 vande'haṃ sāshtānāgāmurukuchayugalām yoginīm<sup>1</sup> kāmarūpām //

"I adore the goddess, the mother of snakes, whose face is like the moon, who is graceful in appearance, the bountiful, who rides on a swan, the noble one, who wears a red garment, who always gives boons of all kinds, who has a smiling face, who is adorned with gold, gems and various other beautiful jewels (obtained) from snakes, who is accompanied by eight snakes, who has prominent breasts, who is a yoginī and who can take any form at will".

The above dhyāna is the most popular of all the dhyānas current in West Bengal in particular and Bengal in general. The earliest reference to it is found in the Tithitattva of Raghunandana.<sup>2</sup> Bhattasali, one of the earlier students of the cult, has failed to find the source of this verse.<sup>3</sup>

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1. According to alternative reading it is found "bhoginīm" meaning "the enjoyer", "the mistress" and "the coiled".
  2. K.M.Raychaudhuri, Ed., Tithitattva, p.38; Quoted by Sankarananda, op.cit., p.91. In the latter work this verse is referred to as being quoted from Raghunandana's work. Both the above works refer to "bhoginīm" in place of "yoginīm" as stated by N.N.Vasu (The Arch.Survey of Mayurabhanja, Intro.p.xxxviii) and Bhattasali (Icono.Budd and Brah. Sculp.Dacca Museum, p.218). In the present day worship both the words are used.
  3. Bhattasali, op.cit., p.218.

(B) hemānbho janibhām lasadvishadhārālāṅkārasaṁśobhitām  
 smerāsyām parito mahoragaganaiḥ saṁsevyamānām sadā /  
 devīmāstikamātaram śīśusutām āpīnatuṅgastanīm  
 hastānbho jayugena nāgayugalaṁ saṁbibhratīmāśraye //

"I take shelter in the goddess who shines like a golden lotus, who is decorated with ornaments formed by shining snakes, who has a smiling face, who is attended on all sides, who is the mother of Āstika, who has a child<sup>1</sup> who has well developed prominent bosoms and who holds two snakes in her two hands".

The dhyāna B has been quoted by Bhattasali who states that it is found in the commentary of Kāśīrām Vāchaspati on Tithyādi Tattvam, section 79, by Raghunandana.<sup>2</sup>

(C) kāntyā kāñchanasannibhām suvaḍanām padmānanām śobhanām  
 nāgendraiḥ kṛitāśekharām phaṇimayīm divyāṅgarāgānvitām /  
 chārvaṅgīm dadhatīm prasādamabhayaṁ nityaṁ karābhyām mudā  
 vande śaṅkaraputtrikām vishaṇarīm padmodbhavām jāṅgulīm //

"I adore the lotus-born goddess Jāṅgulī, the remover of poison, the daughter of Śaṅkara (Śiva), who is of golden complexion, who has a graceful face like a lotus, who is charming, whose head is crowned by snakes, whose body is covered with divine cosmetics, who has gracious limbs and who

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1. Presumably on her lap, held by two of her four hands.  
 2. Bhattasali, op.cit., pp.226-227.

cheerfully carries in her two hands grace and protection (for her devotees)".

This dhyāna has not been found in any Sanskrit ritual text and is not very commonly used in present day worship. An early reference to this dhyāna with a little variation is found in a ritualistic text on Dharma worship.<sup>1</sup>

(D) vishaharīm gauravarāṇām trinetraṁ nānā lāṅkārabhūṣitāṁ /  
kañchukābaddhagātrīm ananta-vāsuki-takshakamukutāṁ  
kulīrakarkaṭa-karṇābharaṇāṁ /  
śaṅkha-padma-kambalānvitāṁ padmahārāṁ prasannavadanāṁ  
dhyāyet /

"One should conceive the goddess, the remover of poison, who is of fair complexion, who has three eyes, who is decorated with various ornaments, who wears a kuchabandha, who has a crown made of the snakes Ananta, Vasuki and Takshaka, whose earrings are formed by the snakes Kulīra and Karkaṭa, who is adorned with the snakes Śaṅkha, Padma and Kambala,<sup>2</sup> who wears a hāra (necklace) of lotuses (or consisting of the snake Padma) and who is graceful in appearance".

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1. N.G. Bandyopadhyay, Ed., Dharmapūjāvidhāna, pp.97 f.
  2. The interpretation of these three words as the three different kinds of snakes has been given by Sankarananda (Manasā Charit, p.91). In the translation of the verse we have also interpreted the words as such.

The dhyāna D is current in Sylhet, East Pakistan, which was once a great centre of Manasā cult down to the partition of 1947.<sup>1</sup>

(E) oṇ padmāvatīm mahābhāgām sarvadā bhakta-vatsalām /  
 trilochanām chaturbāhu-kirīṭi-kuṇḍalānvitām //  
 devīm vishaharīm gaurīm nīla-nāgadadhatkachām /  
 takshaka-ananta-vāsuki-mukūṭachandra-śekharam //  
 kulikena cha nāgena savyaśravanarājitam /  
 taptakāñchanavarṇābhām nāgayajñopavītinīm //  
 śaṅkhapāla varābhyañcha dakshastamaho jvalām /  
 kambalenābhayenaiva savyāpāṇī-vibhūshitām //  
 dhūmra-varṇena nāgena keyūra-nava-yauvanām /  
 svarṇa-varṇena nāgena kaṅkana supratishṭhitām //  
 kunda-varṇena nā nāgena kaṭisūtra-virājitām  
 raktavastra-paridhānā padmāsana-samanvitām //  
 chaturbhirāja-haṃsaiścha vimāna-varagāminīm /

"O Padmāvatī, the noble hearted, who is sympathetic towards her devotees, who has three eyes, four arms, a crown and earrings, who is the healer of poison, who is of golden yellow complexion, whose crown is formed by the snakes Takshaka, Ananta and Vāsuki, whose earrings are made of the snake Kulika, who has a sacred thread of golden colour formed by snakes, who

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1. Sankarananda, op.cit., p.91.

holds the snake Śaṅkha in one of her two right hands and whose other (right hand) shows varada; (who in one of her other two hands) holds the snake Kambala and whose other (hand) is in abhaya-mudrā, who is decorated with keyūra, kankana and kaṭisūtra, made of black, golden and yellow snakes respectively, who wears a red garment, who is seated on a lotus throne and who rides on a splendid aerial car carried by four swans".

(F) oṃ devīm kirīṭi-kuṇḍala-dharāṃ śīrachandra-vibhushī tām //  
 jaṭājuṭa-samāyuktā pīnonnata-payodharāṃ /  
 nayanotpala-patrābhāṃ śārādindu-samānanāṃ //  
 nāga-hāreṇa saṃyuktāṃ trinetraṃ varadāṃ śivāṃ /  
 bāla-kadamba-gaurābhāṃ padmāṃ padmakarāṃ śubhāṃ //  
 nānālaṃkāra-saṃyuktāṃ haṃsārūḥā (sic) -varapradāṃ /  
 sureśair (sic) -stuyamānāṃ tvāṃ nāgamātaramāṃ<sup>ḥ</sup> mikāṃ //

"I adore the goddess, the mother of snakes, who has a crown and kuṇḍalas, whose head is lighted with moon beams, who, has matted hair, whose breasts are prominent, whose eyes are like the moon, who has hāras of snakes, who is three-eyed, who is the giver of boons, whose complexion is like that of little Kadamba flowers, who holds a lotus, who is decorated with various ornaments, who rides on a haṃsa and who bestows boons (i.e. shows the varada-pose)."

Dhyānas E and F are current in Assam and regularly used at the time of Manasā worship.<sup>1</sup> The dhyāna F does not specifically mention the number of hands but the reference to only two attributes of her hands - one holding a lotus and the other in varada - implies that the goddess is two-armed.

(G) chāruchampakavarṇābhām sarvāṅgasumanoharām /  
 īshaddhāsyaprasannāsyām śobhitām suksh mavāsasā //  
 suchārūkabarīśobhām ratnābharanābhūshitām /  
 sarvābhyaṅgpradām devīm bhaktānugrahaḥakātarām //  
 sarvavidyāpradām śāntām sarvavidyāviśārādām /  
 nāgendravāhinīm devīm bhaje nāgeśvarīm parām //

"I adore the goddess, the queen of the snakes, who sits on a snake, whose complexion is like that of a lovely Champaka flower, whose whole body is charming, whose face is marked by satisfaction and a slight smile, who is adorned with fine garments, who has a fascinating chignon, who is adorned with jewels and ornaments, who gives security to all, who is sympathetic towards her devotees because of her love for them, who is the giver of all knowledge, who is peaceful and who is well versed in all learning".

This dhyāna occurs in the Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa,<sup>2</sup> but

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1. Manasā-kāvya, Intro. pp.4-5.

2. Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa, Śrīkrishṇa Tanma khaṇḍa, Adhs. 51, 59-61

nowhere to our knowledge is it recited nowadays at the time of Manasā worship.

The snake association in general and the presence of a canopy of snake hoods in particular on these images have been considered as "a true mark of the identification of Manasā".<sup>1</sup> We have already seen that in all the images of the hypothetical Manasā there is a canopy of snake hoods.

The other figures on these images have been identified by some scholars<sup>2</sup> as Āstika and Jaratkāru, the son and the husband of Manasā respectively as depicted in the Manasā kāvyas and in the Brahmavaivarta and Devībhāgavata Purāṇas.

Lastly, it is reported that in a few places of Bengal such images are worshipped as Manasā.<sup>3</sup>

These points favour the claims of the scholars who have identified these images as Manasā. But before we accept this identification we should consider them more fully.

As regards the dhyānas it is to be noted that none of them can be assigned to a date before the 13th century. The reference to the eight nāgas of the Mahābhārata, and to the

1. B.C.Bhattacharya, Indian Images, Part 1, p.39; H.D.Sankalia, Archaeology of Gujarat, p.147.
2. Bloch's Supp.Catalogue, pp.95f; A.R.A.S.I., 1926-27, p.209; Bhattasali, op.cit., pp.226-227 & footnote; Supp.List, V.R.S.M.; Banerjea, op.cit., p.351; B.C.Bhattacharya, Indian Images, Pt.1, p.39; J.A.R.S., Vol.VIII, 1941, pp.13-16; P.C.Choudhury, op.cit., p.498.
3. J.A.S.B., Vol. XXVIII, 1932, p.181; B.Ghose, Paśchimbaṅger Samskriti, pp.154, 571.

goddess as the daughter of Saṅkara (Siva) and of the mother of Astika in the first three dhyānas, clearly suggest this date; we have already concluded<sup>1</sup> that after the Muslim invasion many of the local deities such as Manasā and Maṅgal Chaṇḍī were absorbed into the Hindu fold by giving a Purāṇic garb to the popular legends and by establishing a close relationship between them and the upper class deities, as depicted in the Manasākāvyas and the later Purāṇas. Thus we believe that Epic, and Purāṇic elements entered into the popular legends of Manasā not later than the 13th and 14th centuries A.D. It might be expected that these dhyānas also originated in this period or later. The dhyānas A and B were quoted by Raghunandana who is believed to have flourished between 1490 and 1570 and whose literary activity probably took place between 1520-1570.<sup>2</sup> Dhyāna G is also of late origin as the date of Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa in the present form has been assigned by R.C.Hazra to a period not later than the 16th century A.D. Though the sources of the dhyānas C,D,E. and F are unknown, these cannot be placed earlier than the dhyānas quoted by Raghunandana. The last three seem to be of very late origin. Moreover an internal

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1. Supra, pp. 300, 305-306, 313-314.

2. P.V.Kane, History of Dharmasastra, Vol.1, p.419; Cf. J.A.S.B., Vol.41, 1915, pp.354-357; A.B.Keith, A History of Sanskrit Literature p.449. S.N.Dasgupta, Ed., A History of Sanskrit Literature, Vol.1, Intro. p.XXIV.



study of the dhyānas A,B and C in their present form suggests that they cannot be assigned to before the 13th century.<sup>1</sup>

However, almost all the images have been dated from the 9th to the 12th century - a period when there is no trace of the dhyānas and when the cult of Manasā was <sup>mostly</sup> confined to the lower classes. Among the illustrated images a few have been discovered in Bihar and Orissa where the above dhyānas are not known at all. Thus it might be wrong to identify these images on the basis of the dhyānas. It is probable that the dhyānas came into existence in a period when a section of people had already begun to worship these images as Manasā because of their association with snakes, and the Brahmans thought to describe the goddess in terms of the older images to show that she was not a goddess of local origin. This phase is clearly seen in the Purāṇas, where she is referred to as the mind-born daughter of Kaśyapa, the disciple of Śiva and the devotee of Kṛṣṇā. A detailed comparison of the dhyānas and the images in question<sup>2</sup> suggests a partial relationship between them. It is likely that the former are based on the latter.

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1. We are greatly indebted to Dr.A.Chatterjee, Sastri, Lecturer in Sanskrit, Sanskrit College, Calcutta who has kindly expressed his opinion from a critical study of the dhyānas.
  2. Tables - I and II (A & B)

As regards the association with snakes, we should remember that from the earliest times, in India, many deities such as Vishṇu, Balarāma, Pārśvanātha, the Nāgas and Nāginīs, the Jaina Padmāvatī and other Jaina deities, are found in iconographic forms and described as having a canopy of snake hoods or as being associated with snakes in some other way.<sup>1</sup> A similar ancient image with a canopy of snake hoods has been discovered in Mayunabhanja, Orissa (Plate 13) and is still worshipped by low class people as Koṭavāsini or Koṭāsani.<sup>2</sup> Such snake-canopied goddesses have not only been discovered in Eastern India but in other parts of India also. A four-armed goddess with a snake hood is now worshipped as Limboji Mātā at Delmal, Gujarat.<sup>3</sup> Thus the snake association or the presence of a canopy of snake hoods is not enough to identify these images as Manasā.

The identification of Āstika and Jaratkāru cannot be accepted. Scholars differ in this matter, for when the goddess is attended by two male figures, one on each side, a few of them identify the emaciated or the bearded one as

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1. For association of snakes with Jaina deities see B.C. Bhattacharya, The Jaina Iconography, pp.124,134-135,144-145, 176.
  2. N.N.Vasu, op.cit., Intro., p.XXXVIII.
  3. A.S.W.I., Vol.IX, p.88; H.D.Sankalia, op.cit., p.147.

Jaratkāru and the other as Āstika;<sup>1</sup> but when the goddess is found with a child on her lap, others identify the child as Āstika.<sup>2</sup> Thus Āstika appears both as a man and as a child. As the Epic and Purāṇic episodes entered into the legends of Manasā later than the period of these images in question, so it would be wrong to identify the attendant figures and the child as such. Moreover many ancient images of a goddess with a child on her lap, but mostly without a canopy of snake hoods (with the exception of one on the bank of the tank called Samsarpokri at Luckeesarai), have been noticed in Valgudar in South Bihar in particular, and in Eastern India in general, and are worshipped by the people in different names.<sup>3</sup>

8 It is to be noted that only in a very few places are these images now worshipped as Manasā. The simple reason behind the identification is the association with snakes. On account of the same association other types of images are also worshipped in Bengal as Manasā or Manasā-Jagatgaūrī. It is reliably reported that two Jaina images are so worshipped in the villages of Dharapata (Plate 14)<sup>4</sup> and of

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1. Supp., List, V.R.S.M., Nos. 66, 485; A.R.A.S.I., 1926-27, p. 209; J.N. Banerjea, op.cit., p. 351.
  2. Bloch's Supp., Cata., pp. 95f. No. 3951; B.C. Bhattacharya, Indian Images, Pt. 1, p. 39; J.A.R.S., Vol. VIII, pp. 13-16; P.C. Chaudhury, op.cit., p. 498.
  3. Epigraphia Indica, Vol. XXVII, pp. 138-139; Cf. R.R. Diwakar, Ed., Bihar Through the Ages, p. 334.
  4. L.B.S.P. (Bishnupur)

Jankur<sup>1</sup> in the district of Bankura. The image of the former place is one of Pārśvanātha with a canopy of seven snake hoods, while a detailed description of the image of the latter place is not given. A peculiar type of ancient female image with a canopy of snake hoods but otherwise not particularly resembling those generally identified with Manasā, is worshipped as Jagatgaurī, a name of Manasā in the villages of Jayakrishnapur, Bankura (Plate 15)<sup>2</sup> and Markeldanga, Burdwan (Plate 16).<sup>3</sup> Thus the present day worship of the image of a snake-canopied goddess does not necessarily indicate that it was intended by its maker to represent Manasā.

Thus the theories in favour of the identification of the images in question as of Manasā do not seem to have been established.

Over and above this, there is a strong point which goes against this identification. We have already seen<sup>4</sup> that nowhere in our kāvyas is the goddess depicted as being worshipped in the form of an icon. She is symbolized by an ungraved pot or pots and a twig of sij (snuhī in Sanskrit) which is still the most common form of her worship.

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1. Folklore, Vol.1, No.4, p.239.

2. L.B.S.P. (Bishnupur)

3. Jugantar, a daily newspaper of Bengal, 5th August, 1960, p.10.

4. Supra, ~~no.~~ chapter V.

Jīmūtavāhana's Kālaviveka, which has been assigned by Kane to not later than about 1400 A.D.,<sup>1</sup> states that "on the fifth day when the lord Janārdana goes to bed in the courtyard of the house, the goddess Manasā, placed (at the foot of) the snuhī tree, should be worshipped. Leaves of pichumardda should be placed in the interior of the house (or temple?). After worshipping the goddess, a man gets no fear from snakes".<sup>2</sup> A similar description has been quoted by Raghunandana.<sup>3</sup> He also refers to a saṅkalpa in the following words: "On the fifth day of the dark half of the month of Śrāvaṇa in order to get rid of the danger from snakes one should make a resolve (saṅkalpa) by announcing his gotra and name and saying that he intends to worship the goddess Manasā in the form of a snuhī tree and, if one is not available, with a pot and water".<sup>4</sup>

The Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa states: "Whoever on the last day of Āshāḍha invokes the goddess (Manasā) in the form of

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1. P.V.Kane, op.cit., Vol.1, p.325.

2. Kālaviveka, Ed., Pandit Pramathanath Tarkabhusan, p.414.

supte janārdane deve pañchmyāṃ bhavanāṅgane //  
 pūjayenmanasāṃ devīm snuhovitapasasṃsthitām //  
 pichumarddasya patrāṇi sthāpayenbhavanodare //  
 pūjayitva naro devīm na sarpabhayaṃāpnuyāt //

3. Kasiram Bachaspati, Ed., Raghunandana's Tithitattva, p.133.

4. Quoted from P.V.Kane, History of Dharmasastra, Vol.V, p.425 (foot-note "atra śrāvaṇe māsi, kṛishṇa pakṣe pañchamyāṃ tithou amukagotraḥ śrī amukadevaśarmā sarpobhayābhāvakāmo manasa-devīpūjāmahaṃ karishye iti saṅkalpya snuhi bṛikṣhaṃ pūjayettadabhāve ghate jale vā (Kriyatattva, p.437)).

a twig of gudā tree<sup>1</sup> and worships her with devotion; and whoever sacrifices (animals) on the fifth tithi known as Manasā tithi, will definitely be blessed with wealth, sons and fame".<sup>2</sup> It appears that even in the Sāstra literature the goddess is never referred to as worshipped in the form of an image.

Thus it is quite clear that formerly Manasā was never worshipped iconically. For present day worship earthen images are made (Plate 17<sup>18</sup> and 19) which have very little or no correspondence with the images in question.

In this connection we should remember the descriptions of the goddess found in the different Manasākāvyas. Though no character of our kāvyas is depicted as worshipping the goddess in the form of an icon, the descriptions may be accepted as of the later iconographic representations of the goddess. The process of absorption of the goddess into the Hindu fold was carried on by the poets and the Brahmans - the former by incorporating the Epic and Purāṇic elements and giving iconographic descriptions and the latter by composing dhyānas on the basis of the older images which were then worshipped as Manasā for the reason stated above. Now let us examine the descriptions of Manasā in the texts.

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1. It means snuhi or si tree.

2. Brahmavaivarta Purāṇa, Prakṛiti Khaṇḍa, Adh. 46, 8-9.

(A) haṃsabāhane bandama debī padmāvatī /  
 asṭṭanāga sahita mā esa śīghryagati //  
 duiḍike dui haṃsa madhye ajāgara /  
 nāgachatra sobhicche jār māthār upar //<sup>1</sup>

"I adore the goddess Padmāvatī who has a haṃsa as her mount;  
 O mother! appear soon with a company of eight nāgas; on  
 either side of the goddess is a haṃsa and in the middle is  
 (the snake) Ajāgara. She is decorated by a canopy of snakes  
 on her head".

The reference to the haṃsa as the mount of Manasā is  
 made in the versions of Durgābar<sup>2</sup> and Jagajjiban<sup>3</sup> and in the  
dhyānas A, E and F already quoted.

(B) nāna ratna alaṅkāra pari aṅgarāge  
 kumḥkum kasturi gandha dhāya daśa dige /  
 bichitra ambāra pari hṛidaya kāñchulī  
 katākshe mohana-kām manasākumārī /  
 ajagara sarpe padmā kṛitāsana kari  
 phanī kāla bekāla yugala hast dhari /  
 dui ghaṭe śire dui padāṅguli diyā  
 nṛipatire dila dekhā ishata hāsiyā /<sup>4</sup>

1. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., p.2.

2. Manasā-Kāvya, p.15.

3. Jagajjiban, op.cit., p.235.

4. Bipradās, op.cit., p.23; cf. Ibid., p.75.

"The goddess appears before the king (Chanda) with a faint smile and rests (her body) by placing her toes on the rims of the two pots (used by Chando at the time of her worship). She is adorned with jewelled ornaments on her body and from her body a smell of kumkum and kasturi spreads all round. She wears a decorated garment and kuchabandha, who has love charms on her eyes, who sits in the kṛitāsana on the snake Ajāgara, and who holds the snakes Kāla and Bekāla in her two hands".

A similar reference to the snake as the mount of Manasā is found in the versions of Durgābar<sup>1</sup> and Ketakādās<sup>2</sup> and in the dhyāna G.

(C) chārikhāni hasta dao tina nayāna /  
 śiver lakshana kari karaha nirmāna //  
 etaśuninirmālihunkāra mārila /  
 tatakshane padmāvatī nirmāna haila //  
 ....  
 prakasita tina ākhi jena rakta barna dekhi  
 sarpa phanā sireta subhita /  
 jñāne chaitanya pāyā basilena uṭhiyā  
 nāga śalankāre bibhūsita //  
 ....  
 dhabala āpana murti rakta gaura hena kānti  
 hailek siber lakshana //<sup>3</sup>

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1. Manasā-Kāvya, p.11.
  2. Ketakādās, op.cit., p.394.
  3. Nārāyan Deb, op.cit., pp.17-18.



"Having the instruction (from Vāsuki) to make a four-armed and three-eyed figure, similar to that of Śiva, the nirmāli (the builder) applies his power and then Padmāvatī is made ... The goddess is seen with her three open eyes of red colour and with a canopy over her head. When she gets life after obtaining Knowledge (or when she gets back to consciousness), she sits and adorns herself with snake ornaments ... She is fair in form and graceful in her appearance, resembling Śiva".

The reference to the four hands and three eyes occurs in the version of Baṃśīdās<sup>1</sup> and in the dhyāna E.A. A similar reference to the three-eyed goddess is also found in the dhyānas D. and F.

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Now we shall discuss the view that the conceptions of different goddesses have been embodied in the cult of Manasā.

#### I. Sarasvatī, Jāṅgulī and Manasā:

It was first suggested by B. Bhattacharyya that the Hindus borrowed the Buddhist snake goddess Jāṅgulī under the name Manasā.<sup>2</sup> But before we speak of the relationship

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1. Baṃśīdās, op.cit., p.119.

2. B. Bhattacharyya, The Buddhist Iconography, Forward, p.1.

between Jāṅgulī and Manasā, we should consider that between Sarasvatī and Jāṅgulī, as the former is believed to be the source of origin of the latter.

(i) Sarasvatī and Jāṅgulī ... In the Sādhanaṁālā, a collection of sādhanas or rituals for worshipping deities, there are "several interesting Mantras for the prevention of snake bite, and for the extraction of poison from the body of the patient. In the Sādhanas of Jāṅgulī, it is written that her Mantra has extraordinary powers inasmuch as whoever hears it, but once, will not be bitten by a snake for seven years, and whoever keeps the Mantra in memory, is never bitten by a snake throughout life".<sup>1</sup>

Such was the religious belief of the Buddhists about their goddess. As regards the antiquity of Jāṅgulī it is claimed by

Mahāyāna Buddhists that she is as old as Buddha himself.<sup>2</sup> Mahāyāna Buddhists that she is as old as Buddha himself.<sup>2</sup>

It is further believed that the secrets of the goddess and the mantras relating to her were taught by Buddha to Ananda.<sup>3</sup> Bhattasali explains the name Jāṅgulī as the goddess of the wilds. He continues: "She is a daughter

1. B.Bhattacharyya, Ed., Sādhanaṁālā, Vol.1, Preface, XVI.

2. B.Bhattacharyya, The Buddhist Iconography, p.78; Bhattasali, op.cit., p.222.

3. Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.78.

of the Savaras (Savarakumārī) or the wild tribes of India. She is a charmer of snakes and is invoked against snake-bite ... It can only be said that Jāngulī appears to have been a divinity of the aboriginal tribes of India and was given a shape and admitted into the Buddhist Pantheon in a fairly early period".<sup>1</sup> To establish the antiquity of the goddess Bhattasali refers to the Atharva-Veda, where a little girl of the Kirātas digs up a remedy against snake poison with golden shovels, upon the ridges of the mountains.<sup>2</sup> In the same text it is said that devotees take shelter under the poison-spoiling track of a girl who is known as Tāudī or Ghritāchi.<sup>3</sup> On the basis of these references he draws conclusions about the antiquity of Jāngulī. He also thinks that the two girls mentioned in the Atharva-Veda were one and the same.<sup>4</sup> A. Bhattacharya, the champion of this view, further adds that though divinity is not attached to the character of the girl of the Kirātas, some divinity inherent in her can be inferred from her magical power against snake bite.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Bhattasali, op.cit., pp. 221-222.

2. Atharva-Veda, X-4-14; For translation see Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. VIII, p.577.

3. Atharva-Veda, X-4-24; For translation see Harvard Oriental Series. Vol. VIII, p.578.

4. Bhattasali, op.cit., p.222.

5. Folklore, Vol.1, No.3, p.175.

Further Bhattasali identifies Sarasvatī with Ghṛitāchi, as the latter is only another name of the former. As Sarasvatī is referred to in the same text as a destroyer of poison<sup>1</sup> and as there are certain similarities between the attributes of Sarasvatī and Jāṅgulī, Bhattasali thinks: "Sarasvatī, in this aspect, was a girl of the Savaras (sic). This aspect did not develop in the Brahmanical Pantheon, but the Mahāyāna Buddhists accepted this snake goddess and called her Jāṅgulī, and did not forget her connection with the Savaras. The Brahmanical anti-venom Sarasvatī, - the source of Jāṅgulī, who forgotten before the latter's rising popularity".<sup>2</sup>

The same view has been repeated by A. Bhattacharya with few additions. He writes: "... it was in the age of Yajur-Veda that serpent lore was considered to be a special branch of study like the study of music. Naturally, therefore, the presiding deity of the serpent - lore came to be identified with a form of the goddess of learning and Janguli and Sarasvati came to be identified in that way. In the subsequent conception of Vedic Saraswati, this non-Aryan element in her having any connection with

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1. Atharva-Veda, VI-100-1; For translation see Harvard Oriental Series, Vol. VII, p. 354.

2. Bhattasali, op.cit., p. 223.

the serpent was, however, discarded ... Thus though Janguli and Saraswati were originally one, Jāṅgulī resorted to the Buddhist Tantric school and Saraswatī to the Vedic Hindu Society and thus (sic) became gradually estranged from each other."<sup>1</sup>

Before we examine these views let us enumerate the sādhanas which give the different forms of Jāṅgulī.

(A) "... ātmānam ārya-jāṅgulīrūpāṃ sarvasuklāṃ chaturbhujaṃ ekamukhāṃ jaṭāmukuṭinīṃ śuklōttariyāṃ sitaratnālaṅkārabhūshitaṃ

śuklasarpavibhūshitaṃ sattvaparyāṅkamāviśṭāṃ, mūlabhujābhyāṃ vīṇāṃ vādayantiṃ, dvitīyavāmabhujena śitasarpadharinīṃ

aparadākṣi-  
ṇenābhayaṇpradāṃ chandrāṃśumālīnīṃ dhyāyāt ...".<sup>2</sup>

"The worshipper is to conceive himself as Ārya-Jāṅgulī who is all white, four-armed and one faced, who has a crown of matted hair, who has a white scarf, who is adorned with white ornaments of gems, who has white snakes as her ornaments, who rides on an animal, whose principal hands play on the vīṇā, who holds a white snake in her second

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1. Folklore, Vol.1, No.3, pp.175-176: "Sarpa-Vidyā, the science of snakes' is enumerated in the Śatapatha Brāhmaṇa among branches of learning. It must have been reduced to fixed rules, since a section (parvan) of it is referred to as studied. The Gopatha Brāhmaṇa has the form of Sarpa-Veda" (Macdonell and Keith, Vedic Index, Vol.II, p.438).
  2. Sādhana-mālā, Vol.1, p.253.

left and gives protection with the second right and who is garlanded with moon-beams".

(B) This type of the goddess differs in some respects as stated in the sādhana A. The principal hands hold a Trisūla and a peacock's tail feather respectively in place of the vīṇā in A. There is no mention of any mount in this variety. Other features are like those of A.<sup>1</sup>

(C) ...ārya-jāṅgulīṃ ātmānaṃ jhaṭiti nishpādayet, pītām, trimukhāṃ śaṣṭbhujāṃ nilasitadakṣiṇetaravadanāṃ khaḍgava-jrabāṇadakṣiṇahastatrayāṃ satarjanīpāśavishapushpakārmukavām-akaratravāṃ sphītaphaṇāmaṇḍalaśiraḥsarpasthāṃ divyavastrā-bharaṇabhūṣhī tām kumārīlakṣhaṇojjvalām akṣhobhyākrāntama-stakāṃ dhyātvā mantraṃ jayet om jāṅgulī sarvavishapraśamani huḥ svāhā.<sup>2</sup>

"The worshipper is quickly to conceive of himself as Ārya-Jāṅgulī, who is yellow in complexion, three-faced and six-armed, whose right and left faces are blue and white respectively, who holds a sword, a vajra and an arrow in her three right hands and noose on the index finger, a blue lotus and a bow in three left hands, who is decorated by an expanded snake hood over her head, who is adorned with celestial dress and ornaments, who has the shining auspicious

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1. Quoted from Bhattacharyya's The Buddhist Iconography, p.79.  
 2. Sādhana-mālā, Vol.1, p.248.

marks of a virgin and an image of Akshobhya on her head. Thus after meditation the worshipper should utter a mantra: "Om Jāṅgulī, the remover of all poisons, huh svāhā".

N.N.Vasu writes that the description of the two-armed goddess Jāṅgulī Tārā is also found in the Sādhnamālā. He referred to an image of a two-armed goddess found in the old fortress of Hariharpur, Mayurbhanja, Orissa, which is now worshipped by the name Koṭāsanī or Koṭavasini. He also adds that several broken images of the goddess have been discovered near Khitching, Mayurbhanja.<sup>1</sup>

On the other hand dhyanas of Sarasvatī are found in the Agni Purāṇa,<sup>2</sup> Śārada Tilaka Tantra<sup>3</sup> and Prapañchasāra Tantra.<sup>4</sup> From a comparison of the dhyanas of Sarasvatī and Jāṅgulī<sup>5</sup> it is seen that though there are a few similarities<sup>6</sup> i.e., playing on a vīṇā with two hands and white dress and ornaments, it cannot be asserted that Jāṅgulī originated from Sarasvatī. Such similarities as there are, seem rather to be mere coincidences. Moreover, similarities in features

1. N.N.Vasu, op.cit., Intro. pp.LXXXVII-LXXXVIII.
2. Rajendralal Mitra, Ed., Agni Purāṇa, Vols.1, p.143 and III, p.171.
3. A.Avalon, Ed., Tāntic Texts, Vol.XVI, part 1. pp.391, 403, 405, 406, 408, 410.
4. Ibid, Vol.XVIII, Part 1, pp. 102, 125.
5. Tables IV and V.
6. Bhattacharya refers to a swan as the mount of Jāṅgulī while identifying her with Sarasvatī (Folklore, Vol.1, No.3, p.175). But we have not been able to find out any dhyaṇa or sādhana where Jāṅgulī is referred to as riding on a swan. He has not mentioned the source.

and other characters are found among the deities of different religious systems. In that case it may be suggested that there are certain features common to the deities concerned but on evidence as dubious as this we cannot say that one has originated from the other or vice versa. The vīṇā as the attribute of other divinities is not unknown. A Nāgini figure of the 10th century A.D. playing a vīṇā with two hands has been discovered from Khitching, Mayurbhanja.<sup>1</sup>

The later Vedic reference to Sarasvatī as a destroyer of poison does not necessarily indicate that this was one of her regular functions in the Vedic period. Hindus have always believed that a deity has numerous powers as well as those connected with his primary function. The single reference to Sarasvatī as a destroyer of poison was no doubt the outcome of such a belief.

The claim that the antiquity of Jāṅgulī goes back to the time of Buddha is doubtful for two reasons. Firstly, no literary reference to Jāṅgulī can be traced back before the time of Indrabhūti (Circa 700-750 A.D.), and the sādhanas were not compiled until the middle of the 12th century A.D.<sup>2</sup> Secondly, the Mahāyāna Buddhists would have

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1. Banerjea, op.cit., p.378 and Plate XX, fig.2.

2. Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.159.



good reason for attributing a spurious antiquity to this goddess, in order to link her up with the historical Buddha and thus increase her popularity. A similar attempt in relation to a snake goddess is also found elsewhere.<sup>1</sup>

The difference of time between the reference to Sarasvatī in her poison-healing aspect and the period of the origin of Jāṅgulī seems to be a matter of many centuries. Down to the period of the origin of Jāṅgulī, Sarasvatī is nowhere referred to as being worshipped as the destroyer of poison. This long gap between these deities goes against the view that Jāṅgulī borrowed the aspect of poison-healing from Sarasvatī.

It is to be noted in this connection that in Japan the white snake is believed to be a manifestation of Sarasvatī and the latter is worshipped in the form of the former.<sup>2</sup> A. Getty writes: "The lute which Jāṅgulī Tārā carries is the special symbol of Sarasvatī, while the white snake, which is the special symbol of Jāṅgulī Tārā, symbolizes Sarasvatī".<sup>3</sup> From this she concludes that the Japanese have confounded the two goddesses, Sarasvatī and

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1. Supra, pp. 248-249.

2. A. Getty, The Gods of Northern Buddhism, pp.122f.127.

3. Ibid., p.123.

Jāṅgulī.<sup>1</sup> But how this practice came into existence and its date of origin are not mentioned. However, the scholar is not wholly correct when she speaks of the lute and white snake as the special symbols of Sarasvatī and Jāṅgulī respectively, as we have already seen from our analysis<sup>2</sup> that of the ten dhyānas only three refer to the vīṇā as the attribute of the former and that of the three dhyānas one does not refer to the snake attribute of the latter.

Thus the view that Jāṅgulī originated from Sarasvatī has not been established.

(ii) Sarasvatī and Manasā - On the basis of the dhyānas A and G, already quoted, where Manasā is referred to as riding on a haṃsa and having features like those of Sarasvatī respectively, and from the presence of similar attributes in the hands of an image said to be of Manasā,<sup>3</sup> Bhattasali thinks that Manasā was originally identical with Sarasvatī or Brahmāṇī.<sup>4</sup> This view is repeated by later scholars. It is believed by B.K.Barua and S.N. Sarma that the characteristics of fair complexion, the haṃsa as mount, and the function of

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1. Ibid., p.127.

2. Tables e IV and V.

3. Supra, p.2 and Plate 3.

4. Bhattasali, op.cit., pp.218-219.

destroyer of poison, in the dhyānas of Manasā recited in the present day worship in Assam, and the attribution of the epithet Brahmāṇī to Manasā in the Assamese version, indicate that Manasā has some connections with Sarasvatī.<sup>1</sup> S.B.Bhattacharya adds that the fact that Manasā and the Ashṭa-nāgas (eight principal Nāga kings of the Mahābhārata) are worshipped on the fifth tithi as is Sarasvatī, is a further proof that originally Manasā was in some measure a goddess of learning.<sup>2</sup> S.Sen, on the other hand, believes that Sarasvatī is but another phase of Manasā.<sup>3</sup> This view of Sen is not supported by any evidence.

The partial similarity between the two deities, such as resemblances in the dhyānas, the use of the epithet "Brahmāṇī" and the reference to their worship on the same tithi, are not enough to warrant the conclusion that Sarasvatī was the source of Manasā. The use of epithets such as Brahmāṇī, Maheśvarī and Ādyā-śakti does not necessarily bear any special significance in relation to Manasā. A careful study of the stories relating to the local deities of Bengal suggests that the use of this type of epithet for

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1. Manasā-Kāvya, Intro. pp.4-5.

2. S.B.Bhattacharya, Ed., Dvijā Mādhava's Māṅgal Chandīr Gitā, Intro., p.32.

3. Bipradās, op.cit., Intro., p.XXXV

a goddess of local origin is nothing but an attempt to give social status to the deity either by identifying her with a Sakti of one of the higher gods or by assuming her relationship of some kind or other with the same. It cannot be denied that in certain places there has been a tendency on the part of her worshippers to endow Manasā with some of the characteristics of Sarasvatī and vice versa. The tendency was probably due to confusion and almost certainly is of a later date. In any case the hypothesis of the identification of Sarasvatī and Manasā is not substantiated. If such influences took place at all, it must have been at a time when Manasā was already recognized in orthodox circles, long after her original conception among the lower classes.

(iii) Jāṅgulī and Manasā - We have already observed the view of B. Bhattacharyya who suggests the identity of Jāṅgulī and Manasā. He writes: "The Hindu goddess Manasā or Viṣaharī has a marked resemblance to the appearance of Jāṅgulī, and some of the Dhyānas in the Hindu Tāntric works for the goddess distinctly give her the epithet of 'Jāṅgulī'".<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately he has not quoted these dhyānas or the sources

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1. B. Bhattacharyya, op.cit., p.80.

where they occur.<sup>1</sup> His view is championed by A.Bhattacharya who adds that with the decline of the Pāla Empire the name Jāṅgulī for the Buddhist snake goddess was dropped and the new name Manasā was coined.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand Bhattasali differs from this view and believes that during the period of Brahmanical revival under the Senas, Manasā quickly outdid Jāṅgulī in popularity and finally succeeded "in absorbing Jāṅgulī within herself". He supports his view by quoting the dhyāna C, where the word "Jāṅgulī is used as an epithet of Manasā.<sup>3</sup> On the strength of the same dhyana and the reference to Jāṅgulī as one of the names of Manasā in the text of Bipradās<sup>4</sup>, A.Bhattacharya supports the identity of the two goddesses.<sup>5</sup>

However, Bhattacharya is not consistent in his view. On the basis of the images said to be of Manasā, he concludes that the cult of Manasā found a great foothold in Bengali society before the 11th century A.D.<sup>6</sup> Elsewhere he states that with the revival of Hinduism under the Senas the name Manasā was attributed to the Buddhist snake goddess

1. We personally communicated with the author, who was not in a position to help us due to old age and ill health.
2. Folklore, Vol.1, No.3, p.174.
3. Bhattasali, op.cit., p.223.
4. Bipradās, op.cit., p.231, 3.
5. Folklore, Vol.1, No.3. pp.174-175.
6. A.Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., p.148.

Jāṅgulī. But we know that the Senas began to rule only from the second half of the 11th century and the period of revivalism may be traced back to the reign of Vijayasena (cir. 1095-1158), who first ruled over a consolidated empire. As already observed the same scholar places the origin of the Manasā cult at an appreciably earlier date.

In our opinion the view of Bhattasali, who believes that Manasā overthrew Jāṅgulī, deserves fuller support than that of other scholars who believe in the identity of Jāṅgulī and Manasā. It is possible that there were certain influences of Jāṅgulī on Manasā in a period when the latter had already established her position in society.

## II. Padmāvatī and Manasā:

Some scholars believe that the Jaina goddess Padmāvatī was transformed into Manasā in Bengal. B.C. Bhattacharya first observed: "The legend of Padmāvatī is throughout associated with snakes and she belongs to the Nether Regions or Pātala. This serpent symbol is well manifest in art, and so is her other symbol of lotus, which is responsible for the origin of her name. In Bengal Padmāvati with the snake-symbols in (sic) worshipped as Manasā, the goddess of snakes and the wife of Jaratkāru".<sup>1</sup>

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1. B.C. Bhattacharya, The Jaina Iconography, p.145.

This hypothesis is supported by J.N.Banerjea who writes that "Padmāvatī, the Śāsanadevatā of the twenty-third Jaina Pārśvanātha, is like him associated with snakes, and there is little doubt that her Hindu counterpart is the folk-goddess Manasā, one of whose names is also Padmāvatī or Padmā".<sup>1</sup>

Before we examine this hypothesis we shall discuss the descriptions of Padmāvatī found in the Jaina texts. The Yakshinī Padmāvatī is popularly known to both their sects.

According to the Svetāmbaras:-

tathā padmāvatī devī kurkuṭ (sic) -oragavāhanā /  
svarnaṇaṇā padmapāśabhṛd-dakṣiṇakaradvayā /  
phalāṃkuśa dhārābhyāṃ cha vāma doḥhyāṃ virājitā /<sup>2</sup>

"In that manner the goddess Padmavati (is to be worshipped), who has a golden complexion, who has a snake and a cock as mounts, who holds a lotus and a noose in her two right hands and a fruit and a goad in her left hands".<sup>3</sup>

According to the Digambaras:-

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1. J.N.Banerjea, op.cit., p.563.
  2. Hemachandra's Pārśvanātha Charita, Quoted by B.C.Bhattacharya, The Jaina Iconography, p.144; Cf., M.Bloomfield, The Life and Stories of Pārśvanātha, p.167.
  3. Bloomfield takes the meaning of kurkutoraga as the name of a particular snake (op.cit., p.167).

devī padmāvatī nāmnā raktavarṇā chaturbhujā /  
 padmāsanāṁkuṣaṁ dhatte akṣhasūtrāṁ cha paṅkajāṁ /  
 athavā śhaḍbhujādevī chaturviṃśati śhaḍbhujā /  
 pāśāsi kunṭabāleṇḍu gadāmuśalasaṁyutaṁ /  
 bhujāśṭakam samākhyātam chaturvisatir (sic) -uchyate /  
 śaṅkhāśichakravāleṇḍu-padmotpala-śarāsanam /  
 śakti pāśam kuṣaṁ dhantā bāṇa muśalakhetakam /  
 chisūlam (sic) paraśum kunṭam vajram mālāṁ phalaṅgadāṁ /  
 patrañcha pallavam dhatte varadādharmavatsalā//<sup>1</sup>

"The goddess named Padmāvatī, who has a red complexion, who is four-armed, and whose seat is a lotus, holds a goad, a rosary and a lotus; or the goddess (is to be represented) with six arms or twenty four arms. The figure with eight arms is declared to have in her hands a noose, a sword, a spear, a crescent moon, a mace and a muśala. The twenty-four-armed goddess is described; she, the bestower of boons, the lover of piety holds a conch shell, a sword, a chakra, a crescent moon, a lotus, an utpala, a bow, a śakti, a noose, kuśa-grass, a bell, an arrow, a muśala, a trident, an axe, a spear, a thunderbolt, a garland, a fruit, a mace, a leaf, and a twig".

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1. Quoted from B.C.Bhattacharya's The Jaina Iconography, p.144.



A comparison of the descriptions of Manasā and the Jaina Padmāvatī<sup>1</sup> shows that there is very little correspondence. However, the name Padmāvatī or Padmā for Manasā has always been very popular in east and north Bengal, where the collection of poems relating to Manasā is invariably called Padmāpurāṇa and the goddess is still frequently worshipped by the name Padmāvatī or Padmā. According to the legend this name for the goddess is due to the tradition that she was conceived in a lotus.<sup>2</sup> Those who believe in the identity of Manasā and the Jaina Padmāvatī, may explain this tradition away as having arisen long after the entry of the Jaina goddess Padmāvatī into the Hindu fold, when all knowledge of her Jaina connections was forgotten. But certain other points should be considered in this connection.

Firstly, we have not been able to find any literary reference to show that the Yakshinī Padmāvatī was ever worshipped as a goddess of snakes and we have no evidence as to when the Jainas started to worship her as an independent goddess. We have seen that she is iconographically represented along with her master Pārśvanātha and her husband

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1. Tables I, II (A and B), III and VI.

2. Bipradās, op.cit., p.3.

Dharaṇendra or Pārśvayaksha, the yaksha of Pārśvanātha.<sup>1</sup>

An unidentified stone image of a four-armed goddess having a canopy of five snake hoods discovered at Rajgir,<sup>2</sup> has been recently identified by U.P.Shah<sup>3</sup> as the Yakshinī Padmāvatī (Plate 20) and it has been assigned to the 9th or 10th century against the earlier view of the 7th or 8th century. If this identification be accepted, this is the only image of Padmāvatī so far discovered throughout Eastern India. A few independent sculptures of the late mediaeval period are found in Western India.<sup>4</sup>

Secondly, we have already seen<sup>5</sup> that Jainism declined rapidly from the 7th century in Bengal and only a small section of the people practised this religion in the Pāla-Sena period. It is very doubtful whether a religion which had so far declined in a much earlier period would have any influence on the bulk of the lower strata of Hindu society, among whom the goddess Manasā had her birth in the 9th-10th century A.D.

Thus, on the basis of the slender connection of the name only, it is not wise to assume that the Jaina Padmāvatī

1. Supra, ~~GRP 50-51~~; I.A., Vol. XXXII, p.463 and Plate IV, fig.23.

2. A.R.A.S.I. 1930-34 (Part II), p.276 and Plate LXVIII(b).

3. U.P.Shah, Studies in Jaina Art, p.17 and Plate L fig.41; A.L. Basham illustrates this image as Manasā (The Wonder That was India, plate LXVI).

4. Infra, p. 378

5. Supra, pp. 95-97.

was transformed into Manasā in Bengal. It is to be noted that different names and epithets which we find in the Manasākāvyas and the Purāṇas for the goddess Manasā, including the name Manasā itself, seem to have been attributed to a snake goddess in different localities by different persons or groups in different period. Thus the borrowing of the name Padmāvatī from the Jainas may not be impossible, but it is equally or more possible that the term as an epithet for a goddess originated independently. There is nothing to imply that the Jaina goddess Padmāvatī and Manasā were identical. The attempts which have been made to identify Padmāvatī and Manasā are no more convincing than those which have been made to identify Manasā with Sarasvatī and Jāṅgulī.

### III. Manasa and other deities:

S.B.Bhattacharya believes that Manasā is one of the specialized forms of the goddess Manakālī. He has attempted to support his hypothesis by referring to descriptions of the Jaina goddess Vajra-Sṛiṅghalā or Kālī.<sup>1</sup> She is represented both as a Yakshinī and as one of the Vidyādevīs. The Digambaras represent Vajra-Sṛiṅghalā as riding on a swan and holding in her four hands a snake, a noose, a rosary and

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1. Dvija Mādhav, op.cit., Intro., pp.34-35.

a fruit.<sup>1</sup> The Svetāmbara variant of the same Yakshinī, named Kālī, is described as seated on a lotus, as forming the varada mudrā with one hand, and as holding a noose, a snake and goad in her three others.<sup>2</sup> Bhattacharya also adds that in the 18th century Padmapurāṇa of Jiban Krishna Maitra it is stated that the ojha Dhanvantari went out to treat the son of Chāndo after worshipping the goddess Kālī.<sup>3</sup> As regards this point it is to be observed that this version of Jiban Krishna records the events of a period when Manasā was believed to be identical with Kālī as well as with the Śaktis of other gods.<sup>4</sup> The reference to a snake as the attribute of the goddess Vajra-Sṛiṅkhālā or Kālī does not indicate that she was worshipped as a goddess or snakes and that the new deity Manasā developed out of Kālī in her hypothetical aspect as a snake divinity. He further hints at the influence of the demigoddesses Kandarpā of the Svetāmbara Jainas or Mānasī of the Digambaras on Manasā.<sup>5</sup> As Jainism had so little foothold in Eastern India in the period of the evolution

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1. Bhattacharya, The Jaina Iconography, p.124.

2. Ibid., pp.124-125.

3. Dviṇa Mādhab, op.cit., Intro., p.34.

4. Supra, pp. 290, 322.

5. Dviṇa Mādhab, op.cit., Intro., p.35.

of Manasā, such an influence of Jaina deities is hardly conceivable.

Now we turn our attention back to the images having a canopy of snake hoods. These images may be classified into the following categories.

- I. Images said to be of Manasā ..... Plates 1-12
- II. Images worshipped as Jagatgaurī  
or Jagatgaurī-Manasā ..... Plates 15, 16
- III. Image worshipped as Koṭavāsini  
or Koṭāsani ..... Plate 13
- IV. Image identified as Padmāvatī .... Plate 20.

From a study of the dhyānas of Manasā, the descriptions from the Manasākāvyas and the images of the first category,<sup>1</sup> we have seen that there is very little correspondence between the dhyānas and the descriptions on the one hand and the images on the other. As already stated the Brahmans and the poets attempted to formulate the dhyānas and to describe the goddess Manasā respectively in terms of the older images which were then worshipped in some places as Manasā.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Tables I, II (A and B) and III.

2. Supra, p. 348; *Also see* pp. 382-383

The second type of image is worshipped by the name Jagatgaurī or Jagatgaurī-Manasā, on the day or days of Manasā worship. The goddess of Narkeldanga, as already observed,<sup>1</sup> (Plate 16) is seated in the lalitāsana with a child on her left thigh held by her left hand. Her right hand rests on her right thigh and its emblem cannot be seen because the palm is broken. There is a canopy of seven snake hoods. On the pedestal is a lion which seems to be the mount of the goddess. She is also believed to wear a small tiger skin. On the basis of these two peculiarities the image of Narkeldanga has been identified as either a Hindu Tāntric goddess or a Buddhist goddess of the 10th-11th century.<sup>2</sup>

The image of the third category has been identified by N.N.Vasu as the Nagamātā, the mother of snakes.<sup>3</sup> The goddess, already referred to,<sup>4</sup> (Plate 13) is seated, possibly with her legs folded. She is decorated with a head/dress of snake hoods and holds a bowl in both hands. She is seen in a meditative pose with her eyes closed. While describing the serpent worship in Mayuabhanja Vasu

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1. Supra, p. 351

2. Jugantar, 5th August, 1961, p.10.

3. N.N. Vasu, op.cit., Intro., p.XL.

4. Supra, p. 349.

put forward the theory that the Nāga dynasty, a branch of the Scythian race, introduced the Nagamātā and of eight. He believes that Tavitā of the Scythians and Manasā are identical.<sup>1</sup> This view cannot be accepted, for we have given clear evidence that a snake cult originated in India independently long before the entry of any foreign invaders in historical times.<sup>2</sup> Any borrowing of this kind from the Scythians is hardly believable.

The image of the fourth category named Padmāvati has no correspondence with those of the first category. Later sculptures of Padmāvati found in Gujarat, a living and powerful centre of Jaina religion, also do not correspond.<sup>3</sup> A careful study of the images of Padmāvati and of her descriptions in the Jaina texts suggests that there is no relation between these images and those of the first category.

The descriptions of the Buddhist snake goddess Jāngulī do not conform to the images of the first category.

1. Vasu further adds that "this god of the hearth which was a principal object of worship by the Scythians has been called Tabitā or Tabiti by Herodotus" (*Ibid.*) He quotes a description of the goddess Tvaritā from the Sārada-Tilaka Tantra and on the strength of this description he concludes: "The image of this goddess has many points of resemblance with that of Kotāsanī found in Koisārigada. The goddess Tavitā of the Scythians is not unlikely to have been worshipped as Tvaritā by the Indian Sāktas and as the snake goddess Manasā by the Nāgas or the serpent worshippers" (*op.cit.*, Intro., p.XL).

2. *Supra*. pp. 19-20.

3. S.M.Nawab, Jaina Tirthas in India and their Architecture, pp. 32, 36, 38 and Plates 30 (fig. 65), 40 (fig. 86), 45 (fig. 96).

Hence the question arises what is the actual identity of those images which are said to be of Manasā?

A critical study of the Manasākāvyas suggests that Manasā is a goddess of non-Aryan or popular origin who was absorbed into the Hindu fold at a later date. Thus she originated as a grāmadevī. While explaining the characteristics of the village deities it has been observed that before the advancement of the Aryans the people worship the deities by representing stones. "When the Aryan element at length comes on the scene, the rude blue stones disappears and gives place to a carved image ... The common people have their shapeless stone or block which they adore with simple rites in the open air; while side by side with it is a temple to one of the Aryan gods with its carved image and elaborate rites".<sup>1</sup>

In the present day Manasā is also symbolized by a shapeless piece of stone, smeared with vermilion and mostly found under a tree. This custom prevails throughout Bengal, but especially in the districts of Bankura, Birbhum and Midnapur.<sup>2</sup> The method of her worship has always been similar to the worship of the village deities. The images

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1. B.D.G. (Balasore), pp.56-57; Cf., Basham, op.cit., p.316.

2. Cf., B.Ghose, Paschimabanger Samskriti, pp.188, 274.



in question cannot be those of a village deity, and it is most likely that they were carved for temple worship. The place of Manasā in temples at such an early date cannot be inferred in any way. Thus we conclude that the images in question were not those of any village deity but were carved for temple worship - a worship which is very uncommon in relation to Manasā.

In this connection the observation of D.C.Sircar deserves mention. While discussing some of the inscribed images discovered in South Bihar, he refers to the fact that many images of a goddess with a child on her lap and of a goddess with a canopy of snake hoods have been discovered throughout Eastern India.<sup>1</sup> According to him "it seems that the same primitive mother-goddess with a child on her lap, sometimes represented with a lion pedestal and sometimes with a snake canopy, was worshipped under different names in different parts of East India, the snake-canopied form being later endowed with the name Manasā in Bengal. The Jaina Ambikā seems to be an adaption of the same deity."<sup>2</sup> This conjecture of Sircar, which needs further evidence for its corroboration, goes against the identification of the

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1. Epigraphia Indica, Vol. XXVII, pp.138-139.

2. Epigraphia Indica, Vol. XXVII, p.139.

images as Manasā.

Now we sum up our own views which we have already expressed in connection with our discussion.

(1) In view of the many hypotheses which have been advanced in an attempt to associate certain images with the goddess Manasā it is a significant fact that the Śāstra literature such as the Kāla-viveka, the Tithi-tattva and the Manasākāvyas no where mention that the goddess is to be worshipped in the form of an icon.

(2) The claims that the goddess Manasā had her origin in Sarasvatī, Jāṅgulī, Padmāvatī and other goddesses have not been substantiated. The scholars who have made this various claims have not produced any reliable evidence in support of them and their arguments are for this reason unacceptable. There seems to be no reason why Manasā cannot be accepted as a deity in her own right on the evidence of the Manasākāvyas and other literature referred to above, and also on that of the religious ceremonies which are still performed in her honour.

(3) The actual identity of the images said to be of Manasā is still uncertain. The descriptions of the Buddhist snake goddess Jāṅgulī and of the Jaina Padmāvatī do not conform to the images in question.

(4) The dhyanas and the descriptions of Manasā in various sources conform to the images in question in some respects only but not in all. It may be accepted that these were composed in terms of the older images which were then worshipped in some places as the goddess Manasā, no doubt because of the presence of snakes in the images. Images of other types associated with snakes are worshipped as Manasā, even at the present day.

Our own hypothesis, which, we believe, fits the known facts better than any other, is as follows:

The Muslim invasion in Eastern India was followed by a period of frequent warfare and occasional oppression of Hindus and Buddhists, and by ruthless destruction of the Hindu temples and Buddhists monasteries. When an understanding grew up in Bengal between the invaders and the invaded, a new culture found expression in all walks of life. By this time many Hindus and Buddhists had accepted the new religion of Islam. As a reaction against this conversion Brahmanism became more tolerant and the upper class Hindus turned their attention to the local deities, incorporated them in Epic and Purāṇic garb and made them more powerful. The deity Manasā, who had formerly only been worshipped by the lower classes as symbolised by a twig of

si or a pot or both, was now worshipped side by side with the Puranic gods by upper class people with the same symbols, or in some cases in the form of images associated with snakes. Often Buddhist and in some cases, Jaina images lost their proper identities, and began to be associated with the popular deities of the time, and many were given new local names.<sup>1</sup> It is further reported that occasionally Hindu, Buddhist and Jaina temples, left uncared for for a long time, are also converted into shrines for the village deities.<sup>2</sup> Thus it is clear that the images worshipped and identified as Manasā, have not been properly identified. They were originally images used for temple worship, and were later utilized as symbols of Manasā because of their association with snakes. This can be strongly substantiated from the present day worship of male snake-canopied Jaina images in particular,<sup>3</sup> and of other types of images associated with snakes in general, as Manasā.

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1. D.C.Sen, The Folk Literature of Bengal, p.53, Brihat Baṅga, Vol. 1, p.9., B.Ghose, Paschimabāṅger Samskriti, p.277; Man in India, Vol. 35. No.1, pp.26, 29-30.
  2. Man in India, Vol.35, No.1, p.25.
  3. Supra, pp. 350-351

Table-1

Chart showing features of Manasa according to the dhyanas

No. of listed dhyanas	Number of hands and their attributes				Other characteristic features				Source
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	
B.	Snake	Snake	Four-armed goddess	Child on her lap probably held by two lower hands	----	----	Snake ornaments	----	Mother of Ketika Raghunandana
E.	Snake	Snake	Varada	Abhaya	Harasa as vehicle	----	Three eyes	Remover of poison	Unknown
C.	Varada	Abhaya	Two-armed goddess		----	Attended by snakes	----	Remover of poison	Belkown
F.	No mention of hands but ref. of two attributes suggests two arms--	Varada	Lotus		Harasa as mount	----	" "	Crowned by Golden of snakes	Unknown
A.	Goddess with no mention of hands				Harasa as mount	Accompanied by eight snakes	" "	Giver of boons	Mithatava of Raghunandana
D.					----	----	" "	Remover of poison	Unknown
G.					Snake as mount	----	----	Giver of security & knowledge & well versed in learning	Brahmaval-varta Purana

N.B. The similarities of the dhyanas and the two-armed images are given in the columns 1 to 4 under the heading "Other Characteristic features". Features 1-4 are absent in the 4-armed images (See Table-II(A)).

Table-II.(A)  
Chart showing features of 4

No. of listed images	Number of hands and their attributes				Other characteristics											Place
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
1.	Emblems are indistinct				---	---	---	---	Canopy of snake-hoods (numbers indistinct)	---	---	---	---	---	---	1.
2.	Sneke	Pot	Rosary	Manus- cript	---	---	---	---	Canopy of seven snake- hoods	Pot	A Nāga couple on either side & 5 Nāgas in each side	---	---	Linga	---	2.
3.	Varada	Pot	Rosary	Manus- cript	---	---	---	---	??	Pot out of which snakes are coming out.	Nāga couple on either side of the head.	---	---	Linga Ganeśa	---	3.
Different Attributes are same Type					---	---	---	---	??	---	---	---	---	---	A huge head on the pedestal x	X
4.	Leafy branch	Leafy branch	Fruit	Child (left)	---	---	---	---	Canopy of nine snake- hoods	---	---	---	---	---	---	4.
5.	Leafy branch	Sneke	Sneke	Child (left)	---	---	---	---	Canopy of seven snake- hoods	---	---	---	---	---	---	X

Table-II(B)  
Chart showing features of 2 armed images said to be of Manasa

No. of listed images	Hands and their attributes	Other				Characteristic		Features					Plate
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	
1.	Varada with a lotus bud	---	---	---	---	Canopy of seven snake-hoods	Pot	A therio-anthropomorphic Naga on either side	One Vidya dhara on either side	A seated male with jatamukuta on either side.	---	---	5.
2.	Varada Snake	---	Four snakes are carved on each side	---	---	"	Pot	---	Two males. Right with a crown, left with jatamukuta	Linga above the figure	---	---	6
3.	Leafy branch (left)	---	---	---	---	"	---	---	---	---	---	---	7
4.	Ladduka Short staff	dog or small animal, (b) one hama on either side	---	---	---	"	---	A standing Naging on either side	A seated male on either side.	---	---	---	8
5.	Snake (left)	---	---	---	---	"	---	---	A few figures in abhaya pose on the pedestal.	---	---	---	9
6.	Varada with a fruit (left)	---	---	Snakes coiled round the body	---	Single snake-hood.	---	---	---	---	---	---	10
7.	Attributes are not visible	Elephant	---	---	---	Canopy of indistinct snake-hoods.	---	A therio-anthropomorphic Naga on right-left-indistinct.	A standing female figure on either side	---	Standing figure	---	10
8.	Varada Snake	---	---	Three eyes --one on the forehead	---	Canopy of seven snake-hoods	---	---	---	---	---	---	11
9.	Snake Indistinct	---	---	Hooded snakes	---	"	Pot containing snakes	---	A seated male figure on either side.	---	---	---	12.



Table- III

Descriptions of Manasa according to the texts of Manasa literature of Bengal and Assam

No. of listed descriptions	Hands and their attributes	Other characteristics							Source
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	
C.	Four-armed Goddess								
	No mention of their attributes	----	----	Decorated with snake ornaments	Three eyes	----	Crowned by snake hood or hoods	Fair complexion	Narayan Deb pp. 17-18
B.	Two-armed Goddess								
	Snake Snake	Snake as mount	----	----	----	----	----	----	Bhattacharya p. 231; cf., p. 75
A.	Goddess with no mention of hands								
		1) Harasa as mount by eight or other side	Accompanied	----	----	A supply of snakes on her head	----	----	Bhattacharya p. 2
cf.,		Harasa as vehicle	Attended by snakes	Garments and ornaments consisting of snakes	----	----	----	----	Jagajjiban p. 15
		Seated on a snake	----	1) Snakes serve as her dress 1) Bodice made of snakes	----	----	----	----	Manasa-purana p. 11
		Harasa as mount	----	----	----	----	----	----	Ibid., p. 15
	Reference to attributes of conchs made of snakes	Seated on a snake	----	1) Decorated with snake ornaments 1) Bodice made of snakes	----	----	----	----	Ketaladatta p. 394
		1) Snake as mount 1) Harasa as vehicle	----	----	----	----	----	----	Ibid., p. 137
									Ibid., pp. 229, 246

N.B. The similitudes of the descriptions of Manasa literature and the 2-armed images are given in the columns 1-4 under heading "Other characteristic features"



#### Table-IV

N.B. References to six-armed, eight-armed and twenty-four-armed Goddesses are made but the attributes of the hands have not been mentioned as fully as the hands concerned (see p. 35).

Table-V  
Chart showing the features of Sarasvatī

No.	Hands and their attributes				Other Features					Sources
	1	2	3	4	1	2	3	4	5	
1.	Varada	Abhaya	Honary	Book	---	Moon-beam complexion	Decorated with a garland of pearls	Three eyes	---	Agni Purāṇa Chap. 319. Slokas. 1-4.
2.	Playing on a Vīṇa by two hands	??	??	??	---	---	---	---	---	Ibid. Chap. 50. Sloka. 10.
3.	Varada	Skull	??	??	---	---	Decorated with a half-moon on her head	Three eyes	Scripts are seen on her body	Sārada Tīlaka Tantra Patale 7. Sloka. 15.
4.	guṇī	White Lotus	White Lotus	??	---	---	---	---	---	Ibid. Sloka. 67.
5.	Lotus	Pitcher of nectar	Lotus	??	---	---	A half-moon on head, white sandal paste and garland on her body.	Three eyes	Seated on a Lotus	Ibid. Sloka. 82.
6.	Vīṇa	??	Honary	??	---	Human as mount and Kunda flowers	---	---	---	Ibid. Sloka. 69.
7.	Lotus	Lotus	??	??	---	??	Garland on her body	Three eyes	Attended by hermits	Ibid. Sloka. 98.
8. V	Vyakhyā Mudrā	Pitcher full of Kema	??	??	---	---	---	---	---	Ibid. Sloka. 100.
9.	Vīṇa	Pitcher of nectar	??	??	---	Human as mount and Kunda flowers	Decorated with a half-moon on her head.	---	Seated on a white Lotus	Prapañcāśāstra Tantra Chap. 8. Sloka. 41.
10.	Garland	Pitcher	??	Chintā symbol	---	??	---	Three eyes	??	Ibid. Chap. 7. Sloka. 3.

## CHAPTER VIII

### Rites and Ceremonies connected with Manasā

#### Part - I

#### A. Bengal.

The history of the cult in Bengal will be treated under the two political divisions - West Bengal and East Bengal, ~~Pakistan~~.

1. Periods and days of worship - The earliest detailed reference of the worship of Manasā is found in the version of Ketakādāsa. When Manasā met Siva and requested him to bless her so that she would be worshipped by men, Siva said: "There will be twelve festivals in twelve months; people will worship you on the Daśaharā in Jyāishṭha and on the Nāgapañchamī day of Āshāḍha, the latter day of worship is followed by the Jhānpān ceremony of the ojhās. In Śrāvāṇa people will offer you curd and parched corn in abundance. In Bhādra you will be worshipped with a special ritual known as Arāph-Vrata.<sup>1</sup> There will be a

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1. This is the day of observance of a rite when all cooking is prohibited. The cooked food that has been prepared on the day before is offered to the goddess Manasā and finally eaten by the people (Ketakādās, op.cit., Index, p.462).

great festival in Āśvina when people will offer you cold rice. You will be worshipped with si tree branches in Kārtika. An unbroken branch of the si tree should be planted in Agrāhayana, with offerings of all kinds of new things to you. You will be worshipped widely in Pausha, Māgha, Phālguna and Chaitra with offerings of ghee, honey, incense, lights, agaru and sandal by men, gods and Asuras".<sup>1</sup> In the versions of other contemporary and earlier poets different days are specified for her worship, according to the following table:-

Bipradāsa p.62	10th tithi of the bright half of Jyaisṭha (Daśaharā day)	Daily worship p.88	Worship in Vaiśakh p.218
Nārāyaṇ Deb p.26	5th day of the dark half of Śrāvaṇa		
Bijay Gupta p.53		No mention of specific date- reference to daily worship	
Baṃśīdās p.124	i) Ditto	ii) Any fifth tithi, iii) the day of full moon. iv) any Sunday.	
Jagajjīban		No mention of any specific date	

1. Ketakādās, op.cit., pp.134-135. Though the reference to twelve festivals occurs at the beginning of the passage, there is no mention of any festival in Vaiśakha in the text

## Districts of West Bengal:

### 1. Bankura<sup>1</sup>

Though a high percentage of the Hindus worship Manasā, the cult is particularly popular among the lower classes who constitute a large proportion of the population. The goddess is worshipped on different days which are given below chronologically in relation to their popularity.

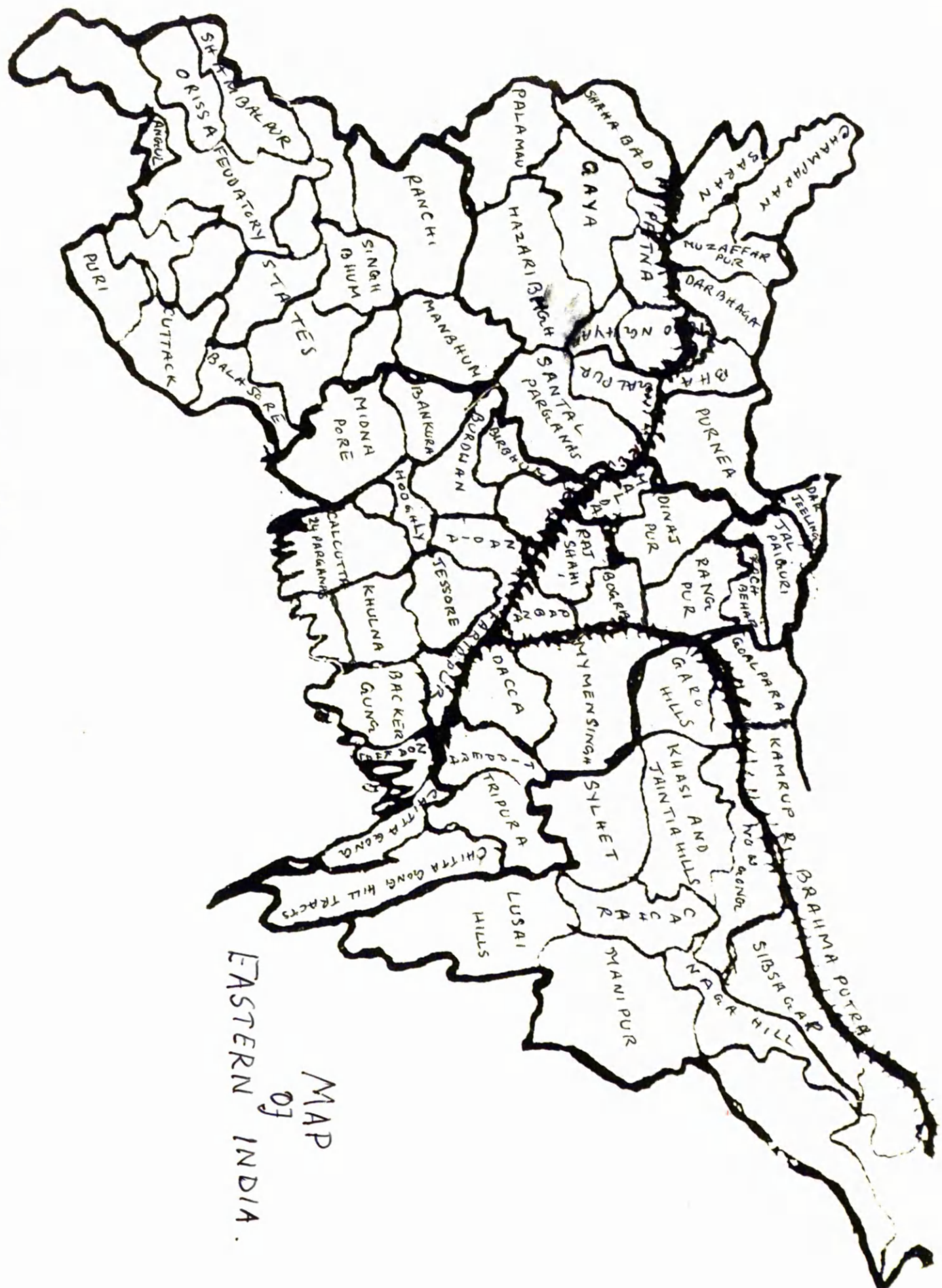
The treatment will be similar in the case of other districts.

(i) Daśaharā - This festival is observed on the tenth (Daśamī) tithi of the bright half of Jyāishṭha and less commonly in Āshāḍha "in honour of the monsoons and the first freshes in the river. It is the anniversary of the day when Bhagīratha, the ancestor of Rāmachandra, brought down the river Ganges from Heaven".<sup>2</sup> This festival is called Daśaharā because it is believed that a proper observance of it takes away the sins of ten births.<sup>3</sup> Actually this is the festival on which the river Ganges is ceremonially worshipped by the Hindus of Bengal. On the same day Manasā is widely worshipped in this district. The origin of Manasā worship on this day can be traced to a few

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1. Except where specified the materials for this survey have been gathered from questionnaires answered by schoolmasters and others throughout western Bengal. A full list of these informants is given in the bibliography.
  2. Feasts & Holidays of the Hindus and Muhammadans, p.15; cf., Calcutta Review, vol. XVIII, 1852, July-Dec. pp.51-52.
  3. Calcutta Review, vol. XVIII, p.52.



BAY OF BEN GIL



# MAP of EASTERN INDIA.

centuries back, as it is mentioned in the versions of Bipradās and Ketakādās. In a few villages such as Ayodhya, Tejpal, Gopalpur, Pansiuli, Jamdagra, Tengasal and others, near Bishnupur, the worship of Manasā on this day is followed by a fair. At Ayodhya in addition to the fair there is a display of fireworks and other amusements. This festival at Ayodhya is very famous in the locality of Bishnupur.

(ii) Nāgapañchamī - This festival is usually observed on the fifth tithi of the bright half of the month of Śrāvaṇa.<sup>1</sup> On the same tithi of the dark half of Āshāḍha, Śrāvaṇa and Bhādra and of the bright half of Agrahāyana this festival is also celebrated in different parts of India.<sup>2</sup> Various legends are current throughout India in relation to it.

Two of the most important are:

- a) The ceremony is observed in honour of the Nāgas of the Mahābhārata, the sons of Kadru who are believed to have been born on the fifth tithi of the bright half of Śrāvaṇa - a day when the whole of India worships the snakes, with few exceptions.<sup>3</sup>

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1. M.M.Underhill, op.cit., p.123; B.D.G. (Bankura), p.51

2. Feasts & Holidays., p.58; Underhill, op.cit., p.123.

3. T. A. Gopinath Rao, op.cit., vol. II. part LI., p.555.

b) It is believed that "this day celebrated the return of Krishna from the Yamunā after having overcome the big river snake Kaliya. Krishna had fallen into the river from a tree overhanging the bank, into which he had climbed to fetch a ball which had lodged there while he was playing with the herds-people. His return with the snake was received with joy, the herdsmen offering Kaliya milk in gratitude for his not having harmed their favourite, Krishna. And so the festival was instituted."<sup>1</sup>

But in Bengal, though these legends may have been popular before the evolution of the cult of Manasā, this ceremony is observed chiefly in honour of that goddess. The reference to Nāgapañchamī on the month of Āshāḍha as one of the days of Manasā worship occurs in the version of Ketakādasī.

In the district of Bankura people observe this festival on the fifth tithi of Śrāvaṇa and, less commonly, on the same tithi of Āshāḍha. On the fifth tithi of Śrāvaṇa there is a great festival in the village Ramsagar, near Bishnupur. This festival is very popular and famous in that locality. All the engraved pots of Manasa

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1. Underhill, op.cit., p. 123.



popularly known as Manasār-bāri which are worshipped on this day in different villages near Ramsagar, are carried to the school ground of Ramsagar at night to celebrate a special folk-festival. A procession of villagers marches round the field with much discordant music carrying these pots on their heads. A great fair is held there on this occasion and there is also a display of fireworks.

c) The goddess is worshipped on the last day of Śrāvaṇa, of Bhādra, and of Āśvina. A great fair is held on the last day of Śrāvaṇa on the ground near the vicinity of the home of the Raj family of Bishnupur. The peculiarity of this fair is the performance of the Jhānpān ceremony which is described elsewhere<sup>1</sup> - a ceremony which attracts thousands of people. In the villages of Jayakrishnapur and Paikpara, four miles away from this place, similar festivals of less popularity are performed on the same day.

d) Ambubachi - This festival is current throughout India among the womenfolk, and is especially popular with widows, who perform it in the rainy season. It is usually observed on the month of Āshāḍha in Bengal. According to this rite

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1. Infra., pp. 484-489.

Hindu women are forbidden to touch fire or take any cooked food during the period of observance, which continues for three days or a week. Digging or ploughing the earth is also forbidden, as it is commonly believed that the mother earth is in her menses during this time.<sup>1</sup> Actually this is the day of worship of the fertility aspect of the mother goddess as represented by the earth.

On the same day Manasa in her fertility aspect is worshipped.

e) The goddess is also worshipped on the fifth tithis of Jyāishṭha, Aśāḍha, Śrāvaṇa, Bhādra and Āśvina, on any Tuesday and Saturday, and on other days also. It is also customary that on the Daśaharā a twig of sij is planted on the Tulsi-talā (a place where a sacred Basil tree is permanently planted) and is worshipped on the same day. Finally it is worshipped and thrown into the water on the Daśamī tithi, when the image of Durgā should be immersed after her worship.

f) Daily worship which is referred to in the versions of Bipradās and Bijay Gupta is performed in some places such as Madanmohanpur, Jayrambati, and Jayakrishnapur, in the permanent shrines of the goddess. In the village of Jayakrishnapur, there is a permanent shrine of the goddess.

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1. Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteer (Bogra), p.38; N.R.Ray, op.cit., p.588.

Jagatgaurī-Manasā where a snake-canopied image of a goddess is installed (Plate-15.). Daily worship is performed, but on the Daśaharā and on the Nāgapañchanī a special offering is arranged. A special rite known as Paushasyā is observed on every Tuesday and Saturday in the month of Pausha. A burnt-offering of ghee (hom) and an offering of khinchurī or jātāl (a dish composed of rice and pulse, seasoned with salt and spices) are performed at this festival. The goddess is also worshipped on every Tuesday and Saturday with offerings additional to those of daily worship. The priestly function is conducted by a Brahman in all cases. He-goats are sacrificed before the goddess but any other non-vegetarian offering is not permissible.

In the village of Jayapur the goddess is worshipped as Jagatgaurī in a permanent shrine. A special feature of this local cult that no one dares to pass by the side of the temple with a lamp. This is strictly observed by the villagers. We have already noticed the worship of a snake-canopied Jaina image in the village of Dharapata as Manasā.<sup>1</sup>

Bāroyārī-pūjā of a special type deserves mention here. This is a form of worship conducted by all classes of

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1. Supra, pp. 350 f.

community either by paying subscriptions or by direct assistance. The ritual is performed in a public place. This type of group worship, which is very common in the case of Sarasvatī and Durgā in Bengal, seems to have originated a few centuries ago or perhaps in ancient times. The seed of this type of worship is found in the 15th century texts, where similar rites in honour of Manasā are performed by cowherds.<sup>1</sup> The present bāroyārī-pūjā or group worship seems the development of such early forms of worship. But it was observed in the year 1820".....A new species of pooja ... has been introduced into Bengal within the last thirty years, called Barowaree ... About thirty years ago, at Goopti-para, near Santipoorā, a town celebrated in Bengal for its numerous Colleges, a number of Brahmins formed an association for the celebration of a Pooja independently of the rules of the Shastras. They elected twelve men as a Committee from which circumstance it takes its name, and solicited subscriptions in all the surrounding villages".<sup>2</sup> After a study of a list of subscriptions in the same village it is suggested by B.Ghose that this sort of bāroyārī-pūjā started at least thirty years earlier than

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1. Supra, pp. 273f.

2. Friend of India, 1820, May, quoted by B.Ghose, Paśchimbanger Samskriti, pp. 476-477.

the report quoted.<sup>1</sup> Thus it seems that since the late 18th century this sort of worship has often been performed, though its early antiquity cannot be ignored.

Usually there is no permanent shrine for this worship. A temporary pavilion is built with bamboos and is screened and decorated with different coloured paper and leaves. The method of this type of worship is almost the same everywhere, with only slight differences here and there. The following is the description of a performance of the bāroyārī-pūjā which is commonly found in the Bishnupur area.

At this worship Manasā is mostly represented with a pot (bāri) but sometimes earthen images are made and worshipped. The worship is conducted by a Brahman priest, in most cases during the day-time. Lotuses, jaba flowers and bel leaves are essential in this type of worship. Two rites are observed on this day.

(a) Agun Sannyās (Walking on the burning charcoal) - Many channels, the measuring approximately 12ft. length, 4ft. breadth and one or two ft. depth or more, are dug in the earth. They are filled with burning charcoal and the devotees of Manasā who have made vows to observe this rite and have fasted for this purpose,<sup>2</sup> walk on the burning

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1. B.Ghose, op.cit., p.477.

2. No information on length of fast.

charcoal. This rite is observed only by men. It reminds us of the Charak festival of Śiva which is observed by the Hindus of Bengal on the last day of Chaitra. In this festival a similar practice, observed by the devotees, is considered to be a part and parcel of it. It seems to us that this rite, as observed by the devotees of Manasā, is a direct borrowing from the Śaiva festival.

(b) Dhunā Purāṇa (Burning of resin) - This is observed by womenfolk. Either a resin pot or a flat earthen pot with burning charcoal in it, is carried by each woman, who has made a vow beforehand, either on her head or on another part of her body. Then the woman pours resin powder on the pot.<sup>1</sup>

These two rites are performed before the pot or image of Manasā by her devotees as vows after the fulfilment of their prayers. We have not been informed of the observance of these rites in any other place except this area.

On the same day fruits of Kāliyā Konrā (Menispermum Polyspermum) are cut into pieces, which are eaten by the people of all classes in the belief that they serve as antedotes against poison. In some places these fruits are

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1. No further details of this rite has been informed.

offered before the goddess and are then distributed among the devotees, who eat them. It is reported that some people are inspired (Bhar or Bharam in Bengali) by the goddess at this ceremony. In such cases the inspired men are believed to be the mouthpieces of the goddess, and the devotees place much importance on their speeches. After the performance of all these rites and ceremonies by day the pot or image is carried in procession at night. The procession, which is followed by folk dances and music and accompanied by musical instruments, is a very gay one.<sup>1</sup>

## 2. Birbhum

Like Bankura the cult is very well developed in this district. It is particularly popular with the aboriginal people who are now semi Hinduised, but for whom the rites of Manasa are still chiefly performed by

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1. For a good deal of the detailed information about the present practice of Manasā worship in this district, we are indebted to Bāṅgiya Sahitya Parisaḍ, Bishnupur Branch.

deyāśīs or non brahman priests.<sup>1</sup>

a) Bagā Pañchamī or Bak Pañchamī - The fifth tithi of the bright half of Bhādra, or less commonly the same tithi of the dark half of this month, is generally known as Bagā Pañchamī or Bak Pañchamī, but in some places as Nāgapañchamī. On this tithi Manasā is widely worshipped throughout the district. A. Bhattacharya, an eminent folklorist of Bengal, has observed a peculiar custom current in the northern part of the district in connection with the worship of Bagā Pañchamī. He writes: "Three or four days previous to this occasion, the Deyasi after he had performed his ablution was made to sit in the temple before the image of the snake deity. Then the only

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1. The word Deyāśī which is also known as Devāṃśī is believed to have originated from Devavaṃśa, meaning literally the descendants of gods or the chosen people of gods. A. Bhattacharya thinks its origin from some non-Aryan source and writes: "For in Southern India the word Deyasi is still very widely used in rural areas to denote a headman 'who may be said in a manner to correspond to a Justice of Peace' " (Folklore, vol.1, No.4, p.233). But Bhattacharya has failed to notice that in South India the word is not Deyāśī but Desāyi. It is recorded: "The word Dēsāyi means of the country. For almost every Tāluk in the North Arcot district there is a headman, called Dēsāyi Chetti, who may be said in a manner to correspond to a Justice of the Peace" (E. Thurston, Castes and Tribes of Southern India, vol.II, p.121).

As these are two different words, we are not inclined to think that the word Deyāśī had its origin from the South Indian Desāyi.

However, the Deyāśīs belong to the lower castes as we have said elsewhere in connection to the priestly function of Manasā (Infra, pp. 426f).



entrance of the shrine was closed from outside. Not only that, the door was practically sealed with mud. All day and night long songs in praise of the serpent-deity were sung from outside the shrine. On the Baka Panchamī day at noon people were believed to hear sounds coming from the other side of the closed and sealed door. They said that the serpents enjoying the favour of the goddess were knocking against the door meaning that they would set the Deyāsi free after opening it. Gradually the door gave way and the Deyasi was found inside in an unconscious state. The Desasi (sic) was then brought to the open air and nursed. All music - vocal and instrumental - were (sic) stopped forthwith".<sup>1</sup>

This spectacular act of austerity on the part of the humble Deyāsi contrasts strikingly with the rituals of the Brahmans who nowadays play a greater part in the local Manasā cults than in earlier times. One is tempted to suggest that the immurement of the Deyāsi may be a comparatively recent local innovation, designed to hold the support of lay patrons, who are tempted to patronize the socially superior Brahmans, by evidence of superior powers in the manipulation of the numina. In other

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1. Folklore, vol. 1, No. 4, p. 235.

placed of the district such as Ganpur, Hatora, Dakshingram, Ratgara, Dahira the goddess is worshipped on this day with great pomp and grandeur, but without the vigil of the Deyāsī.

Besides this the goddess is worshipped on the Daśaharā, on the fifth tithis and on the last days of Jyaishṭha, of Āshāḍha, of Śrāvaṇa, of Bhādra and of Āśvina, on the day of Ambubachi and on any Tuesday and Saturday. She is also worshipped on special occasions in fulfilment of vows. Daily worship is very common in this district. There is hardly any village where there is not a permanent shrine of the goddess, mostly a thatched house.<sup>1</sup> She is often worshipped especially in this district during epidemics of diseases such as small-pox and cholera.

It is reported that "in some places in Birbhum on the Dasahara day the image of the serpent deity Manasa are (sic) taken to a tank and ceremonially bathed. Songs accompanied by instrumental music are sung, eulogising the serpent deity. This is known as Manasa's chalan. On this occasion a peculiar musical instrument, known as Bisam Dhaki made of goat's intestine<sup>2</sup> is played".<sup>3</sup> On the same

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1. Cf. B. Ghose, Paśchimbaṅger Samskriti, p.274; Folklore, vol.1, No.4, p.234.

2. The intestinal tube is split open, spread over, stretched with anchorage on all four corners, dehydrated and put into a shape of a small hand drum.

3. Folklore, vol.1, No.4, p.236.

day a twig of sij is planted on the Tulsī-talā in the home and is worshipped on the fifth tithis of four consecutive pakshas. The sij twig then grows for a few months, without receiving any special attention, and on the day of the immersion of the image of Durgā in Āśvina, the sij is uprooted and also thrown into water.

The wide popularity of the goddess can be well illustrated from the following practice in the same district. There is a mud shrine of the goddess in the house of a Bāggī in the village of Kenduli or Kendubilva, the birth-place of the famous poet Jayadeva, the author of Gītagovinda. It is astonishing that the shrine of Manasā is visited daily by pilgrims from far and near, whereas the big temple of Rādhāmādhava or Kṛishna of the same village, situated within a stone's throw of the shrine of Manasā and believed to have been founded by the poet, is visited only once a year.<sup>1</sup>

### 3. Burdwan

The goddess is worshipped by all Hindus, but the worship is most enthusiastically performed by the lower classes.

It is on the Daśaharā that the goddess is most widely worshipped in this district. Next in importance is

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1. A. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., p.214.

the last day of Śrāvaṇa. In the villages of Jahannagara and Polerhat fairs are held on this day. In the case of the latter place the goddess is worshipped in the form of a pot placed on a mud-throne under an old banyan tree. This worship is known as gāchha-pūjā (tree worship). The fair on this occasion is attended by a great crowd from both the districts of Burdwan and Nadia. But in the former village recitation of the songs relating to Manasā and their illustration by folk dance form special attractions. The jhānpān ceremony is also held there.

The goddess is also worshipped on the fifth tithis of Śrāvaṇa and Bhādra and sometimes of Āshāḍha and Āśvina, on the Nāgapañchamī which is observed on one of the fifth tithis of Śrāvaṇa and Bhādra, on the last day of Bhādra, in some places on the last day of Āshāḍha, and on other days also.

Daily worship is very common in this district, though not so well developed as in Birbhum. In Birbhum the goddess is represented by engraved pots known as bāri, whereas in Burdwan she is represented by ancient images, detailed descriptions of which have not been given by our correspondents. In Birbhum the worship is current among the lower classes and the owners and managers of the permanent shrines are invariably of low caste whereas in

Burdwan the shrines belong to upper class people.

Another notable feature is that in most of the permanent shrines of Burdwan Manasā is worshipped as Jagatgaurī, a name which is almost unheard in other districts. Among them the shrines of Mandalgram, Kasa, Auria, Mejheri, Kaichandagram, Kalsi, Memari, Kejagram, Chotkhanda and Narikeldanga deserve special mention. Besides the daily worship a special worship takes place, the date of which varies from place to place. In most of these places a fair is also held on this occasion, which is followed by a jhānpan ceremony. The fairs of Chatkhanda and Narikeldanga are very famous in this district.<sup>1</sup> Ketakadās refers to the worship of earthen image of Manasā at Narikeldanga by Behula.<sup>2</sup> A reference to a similar image at the shrine of Keja or Kejagram, also occurs in this version.<sup>3</sup> Both these places are still famous as Manasā's permanent seats of worship, though the earthen images have been replaced by stone ones.

#### 4 & 5, Cooch-Bihar and Darjeeling.

It has been recorded by a late 19th century writer that "the cult ... is reported to be exceedingly prevalent

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1. For detailed information, see the recent articles, Desh, 1368B.S. (1961), No. 4, pp. 324-328; Jugāntar, 5th August, 1960, p. 10.
  2. Ketakadās, op.cit., pp. 281-282, 335.
  3. Ibid., p. 336.

in Kuch-Behar, although snakes are not very numerous or particularly deadly in that part of the country."<sup>1</sup> The cult still enjoys the same popularity in this district. The goddess is widely worshipped on the last<sup>day</sup> of Śrāvaṇa. She is also worshipped on the Nāgapañchamī day, any day on the month of Bhādra, sometimes on the dark half of the fifth tithi of Āshāḍha and on special occasions. On the day of special worship, or at group worship on other days, songs of Manasā are recited.

In the district of Darjeeling the cult is confined to the Rājbaṃsis, who worship on the dark half of the fifth tithi of Śrāvaṇa. The percentage of worshippers is very meagre in this district as the people of other religions such as the Nepalese, the Lepchas, the Bhotias and the Tibetans constitute a large proportion of the population.

#### 6. Hooghly

The cult is widely popular in this district among all classes, irrespective of caste and creed. On the Daśaharā the goddess is worshipped more enthusiastically than on any other occasion. The worship on this day is followed by the Arandhana ceremony in the areas of Jangipara, Chanditala, Arambagh, Goghata and Pursura. Sometimes a few

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1. W.W.Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal, vol.V, 1875, p.196.

families observe this ceremony throughout the day when all the members take either previously cooked or uncooked food and at night they light ovens and prepare meals. In some places of Arambagh he-goats are sacrificed on this day, and cooked and eaten by the people in their own houses. In the village of Manasadanga four or five thousand he-goats are sacrificed on this day before the goddess, who is symbolized by an earthen pot and worshipped daily. The other peculiar feature is the recitation of the hymns of Chaṇḍī, which seems to be an attempt to identify Chaṇḍī and Manasā or to relate them to each other.

Manasā is also worshipped on the last days of Āshāḍha, Śrāvaṇa, Bhādra, Āśvina, on the Nāgapañchamī, on any Tuesday or Saturday and other days of the rainy months. Daily worship is common in this district, especially in the above mentioned areas and in the villages of Baligodi and Bhurkunda. The Bāroyārī pūjā which is known as Rākhāle Manasā in this district is a speciality which is conducted in an open field under a tree.<sup>1</sup>

The Muchis (Shoemakers) and other low castes worship Manasā by the name Khādāi on the last day of

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1. L.Nos.1,12 (Hooghly).

Srāvāṇa. The priestly function is generally performed by a Muchi.<sup>1</sup> In the same district Manasā is worshipped daily chiefly by the Jaliyās (fisherman?) under the name Bahulā in a temple at Bainchi where a Jaliyā Brahman conducts the priestly function. Special worships are performed in the same shrine on the full moon day of Vaiśākha and on the Daśaharā.<sup>2</sup>

### 7. Howrah

From our survey it appears that here the percentage of Manasā worshippers is higher than in any other district of west Bengal with the exception of West-Dinajpur. An early account records that her worship is widespread on account of the many dangerous snakes in the district.<sup>3</sup>

As in many other districts she is popularly worshipped on the Daśaharā. Next in importance is the last day of Bhādra when the people observe the Arandhana ceremony. The observation of this rite with some elaboration is very common in this district. She is also worshipped on the last day of Jyāishṭha, known as Sthāpana Saṃkrānti and of Āshāḍha, on the Nāgapañchamī and on any Tuesday and Saturday, especially in the months

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1. D.G.Crawford, A Brief History of the Hughli District, p.73.
  2. Ibid.
  3. B.D.G., (Howrah), pp.43-44.



of Śrāvaṇa and Bhādra.

In the village of Hirapur in the Uluberia subdivision there is a permanent shrine containing an earthen image of the goddess who is worshipped every Sunday by offering a goose. This image of the goddess is very popular among the people from far and near because of the wide range of power attributed to her. Almost equal popularity is enjoyed by a four-armed earthen image of the deity in the village of Vedo in the Domjuda Police Station where daily worship is performed.

A peculiar type of worship which is conducted by the Goalas.<sup>1</sup> It has been recorded that "the Goālās, who graze cattle in the open country and are therefore particularly liable to snake-bite, besides losing many cattle, worship the goddess under the name of Rākhāl Manasā. A manasā plant is set up under a tree, and a special festival takes place on the last day of Paus ... The cowherd boys go round begging and collect money for the offerings, the ceremony itself being conducted by a Brahman".<sup>2</sup> The reference to this type of worship is

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1. Goālā is the great pastoral caste of non-Aryan origin (Risley, *op.cit.*, vol.1, p.282).
  2. B.D.G., (Howrah), pp.43-44.

found in the Bengali Manasākāvyas, as we have already seen.<sup>1</sup> Though we have not been informed of this practice by our correspondents, we can assume that it is still observed in some parts of this district from the survival of a similar practice in the neighbouring district - Hooghly.<sup>2</sup> Clay images of snakes are worshipped as Vastu-Sarpa on any day of the year.

#### 8. Jalpaiguri

Manasā is popular in this district, especially among the Rājbaṃsīs, a sub caste of the Kochh who form two fifths of the population. She is widely worshipped on the last day of Śrāvaṇa. She is also worshipped on the Nāgapañcamī, on the fifth tithi of the dark half of Āshāḍha, on the last day of Bhādra and at auspicious domestic ceremonies such as marriage, the sacred thread ceremony, and the taking of the first cooked food by a child. In some places she is worshipped throughout the months of Sravana and Bhādra. Daily worship is unknown in this district.

The Rājbaṃsīs believe that Manasā is a very evil deity and if she is not propitiated, children die or

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1. Supra, pp. 273 f

2. Supra, p. 403

become blind, men and cattle are bitten by snakes, and all sorts of trouble come.<sup>1</sup> The intensity of this belief can be well explained from the fact that the family of the rajas of this district, which belongs to the Rajbamsī clan, worships the goddess enthusiastically, making earthen images of the principal characters of the legend on the last day of Śrāvaṇa. Her worship on this occasion is followed by a great fair which attracts thousands of people. Sometimes this festival continues throughout Śrāvaṇa.<sup>2</sup>

When Manasā is worshipped by the name Māreyā or Mārāi, her worship continues for three days. At this worship she is represented by a four armed earthen image and animals are invariably slaughtered before the goddess. This form of worship can be arranged at any time of the year. She is generally worshipped on the occasions of auspicious ceremonies. Songs, especially those recounting her dealings with Chāndo, Behulā and Lakhindar, are sung on such occasions. This form of worship is confined to the tribal people in the villages of Salbari under Dhupguri Police Station and of Dakshin Satali.

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1. Eastern Bengal & Assam District Gazetteer (Jalpaiguri), p.34.
  2. Folk-lore, Vol.1, No.4, p.239.

## 9. Malda

Here the cult is not so popular as in the other districts of west Bengal, though over two thirds of the population are worshippers of Manasā. She is widely worshipped on the last day of Śrāvaṇa. She is also worshipped on the Ambubachi, on the last day of Jyāishṭha and of Āshāḍha, on the Nāgapañchamī, on the fifth tithis of Śrāvaṇa and Bhādra and sometimes throughout these two months, and on other special occasions as in the case of Jalpaiguri<sup>1</sup> including on the Nabanna (a festival in honour of the corn) when people cook new corn, and at other auspicious ceremonies in general.

Sometimes on the day or days of Manasā worship the people of east Malda decorate the floors of rooms, verandahs and house compounds with ālpanas of various types made of rice paste. When this is observed, the women abstain from taking food. The observance of Vrata connected with Manasā is a speciality of this district.

## 10. Midnapur

This is a large district, the majority of its population being semi-Hinduised aboriginals. Among these

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1. Supra, p. 406 .

the goddess is very popular.<sup>1</sup> On the Daśaharā the people in general worship the goddess with great pomp. Besides this she is also worshipped on the Ambubachi, on the Nāgapañchamī, on the last day of Srāvaṇa, on the last day of Bhādra when her pūjā is followed by the Arandhana ceremony, less commonly on the last days of Jyāishṭha, and Āshāḍha, on any Tuesday and Saturday, and on special occasions. The ojhās and snake charmers of this district observe her worship very enthusiastically on the last day of Āśvina, and on this occasion earthen images are made. Daily worship is almost unknown in this district with the exception of two places - Nachipur and Mahisadal. The Lodhas of this district worship the goddess in the month of Āśvina.<sup>2</sup>

#### 11. Murshidabad

The cult is no less popular in this district. Manasā is worshipped on the last days of Jyāishṭha, Āshāḍha, Srāvaṇa and Bhādra, on the Nāgapañchamī, on the fifth tithis of Āshāḍha, Srāvaṇa and Bhādra, sometimes throughout the whole month of Srāvaṇa, on the Daśaharā, on any Tuesday and Saturday and on other special occasions.

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1. Cf. B. Ghose, Paśchimabāṅgar Samskriti, p.674.
  2. Man in India, vol. 37, No.3 p.210.

Daily worship is not unknown in this district, notably in Rajhat, Khaspur and Karjjana.

In some places the ojhas worship the goddess throughout the month of Āshāḍha. When an epidemic breaks out, the goddess is widely worshipped. As this aspect is well developed in Birbhum, the influence of the customs of the latter district on the western part of Murshidabad may be suggested. Women plant a twig of siḥ on the Tulsī-talā on the last day of Āshāḍha and also place a pot there; they worship Manasā in this symbolic form every Tuesday and Saturday and on each fifth tithi. How long they continue to do so after planting the siḥ is not specifically reported.

## 12. Nadia

Though the district was largely populated by the Muslims in the days of undivided Bengal, the cult has always been a popular one. The goddess is widely worshipped on the Daśaharā. She is also worshipped on the Nāgapañchamī, and on the last days of the fifth tithis of Śrāvaṇa and Bhādra. The worship of Manasā by planting a twig of siḥ on the Daśaharā is also current in this district as in Birbhum. In the village of Dakshinpara a four armed earthen image is worshipped three times at

night on the day or days of her worship. Daily worship is unknown in this district.

Fairs are held on the days of her worship, especially on those days when the goddess is worshipped in the form of an earthen image. Specially popular are the fairs of the villages of Betna, Ghurni, Nakasipara, Darmada and Muragachha, which are usually held on the last days of Śrāvaṇa and Bhādra. At Nakasipara Manasā is worshipped under a fig tree. Similarly she is worshipped under banyan trees at Dharmada and Muragachha on the last day of Śrāvaṇa. A fair is followed by a jhānpān ceremony in many cases, when songs of Manasā are sung.

A peculiar rite is observed in this district which is found nowhere in any other parts of Bengal. Four or five days before the worship of Manasā the women-folk, after a bath, sow the seeds of mug (a short kidney bean) and of leguminous seeds amounting to one fifth of a seer altogether on a selected field after ploughing. The sown area is then covered by a screen. On a certain day the area is watered after removing the screen, to stimulate the growth of the seedlings. In the afternoon of the day before Manasā worship all the seedlings with the soil attached to their roots are removed from the field and are

kept on seven plates, which are subsequently placed near the spot where the image of Manasā is to be placed. On the same day the image, specially made for the occasion, is brought from the house of an image-maker and placed inside the house under a screen. Offerings of fried rice, murkī (a sort of sweetmeat, parched paddy unhusked and sweetened), milk, plantain, fruits and other things are then made to the goddess by women. Incense is burnt in large quantity, and the women sing the songs of Manasā very enthusiastically.

On the day of actual worship Brahmans perform the priestly functions. Their services are required on the afternoon and evening of the day of actual worship, and on the morning after. At the time of worship the womenfolk sing songs in chorus. Special offerings in this kind of worship include only milk and sabri-kalā (a kind of plantain) as it is popularly believed that these two things are specially liked by the snakes.

On the day of worship the womenfolk arrange a mock-marriage in the afternoon between two unmarried girls in every family of the village Krishnapur (P.O.Hijuly). The rite is popularly known as hālā-biyā as the main requirement is the seedlings called hālā. Both the girls - one playing the rôle of a bride and the other groom - carrying



the plates containing the seedlings change the garlands of Sāpla-flowers with each other as the mark of their marriage. No Brahman priest is required for such a mock-marriage. The women who arrange this marriage perform the brahman's function, and also sing songs of Manasā at the time. Next afternoon, as already observed, a Brahman priest comes and conducts the worship. After that the image is thrown into water. Just before the day of worship the women observe a semi-fast and take only milk and khai (parched paddy) but on the actual day of worship they observe abstinence from food until the worship is over in the evening.<sup>1</sup> This rite corresponds in many respects to that observed in Tripura.<sup>2</sup> It seems to be a fertility ritual.

### 13. 24-Parganas

The goddess is very popular in this district and her worship is widely current on the last day of Bhādra. Next in importance is the Daśaharā. She is also worshipped on the last day of Śrāvana, on any Tuesday or Saturday, on the Nāgapañchamī and on the Ambubachi. Daily worship is very rare in this district. There is a permanent shrine at Kidderpore, near Calcutta where a big brass image of

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1. I.No.3 (Nadia).
  2. Infra., pp. 455-456

the goddess is worshipped daily (Plate - 22 ).<sup>1</sup>

An early account of this district records that "in addition to Manasā, there is a snake goddess called JagatGaurī, who is said to be the sister of Manasā, and like her, is credited with power over cobras and other snakes. She is represented as seated on a throne, with a child on her lap, and her shrine is at Narikeldanga. There a Barna Brahman, officiates at her worship except in the case of Doms and Haris, who sacrifice pigs to her. ... A fair is held to honour this goddess on the fifth day of the moon in the month of Jyaishta".<sup>2</sup> The goddess was removed from this place by the Calcutta Improvement Trust some five years ago for the construction of a road. The image is now in the care of this Trust and the priest who hereditarily worships the goddess has placed another earthen image in her shrine nearby. On the day of Rāmnabamī a fair is held at her worship. This fair is not so large as that held at the worship of Jagatgaurī.<sup>3</sup>

A peculiar practice of worship has been observed by S. L. Hora in the village of Uttarbhag. He writes: "There are, no doubt, other ways of representing the deity

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1. Cf. Folklore, Vol.1, No. 4, p.240.
  2. B.D.G., (24-Parganas), p.71.
  3. We are indebted to Sri M.C.Mahapatra, M.A., for this information.

also, but so far as I have been able to ascertain the mode of representing this godling at Uttarbhag by two conical mounds of mud is quite different from all others so far known. Each mound has three clay heads of cobra arranged on one side and a mark of vermilion put in front of them. It seems probable that these mud-mounds are substitutes for water pans or earthen pots ... It has also to be noted that the pūjā at Uttarbhag was performed towards the end of January or early in February and not, as is usual, in the months of July and August ... The worship of Manasa, has, thus to be treated as a relic, without any specific utilitarian background in its present form".<sup>1</sup> Thus both the days and methods of worship are peculiar in the village of Uttarbhag.

#### 14. West-Dinajpur

The goddess enjoys wider popularity in this district and the percentage of worshippers is higher than other districts of Bengal. Manasā is commonly worshipped on the last day of Śrāvaṇa, and less commonly on the last days of Āshāḍha and Bhādra, on the fifth tithis of Śrāvaṇa, and on any special occasion. The Kshatriyas of this district especially observe her worship on the festival of nabāṇna

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1. J.A.S.B., Vol. XXIX (New Series), p. 34.

(the eating of the first rice grown in the year).

In the permanent shrine of Sri Purna Chandra Chaudhuri of Baram, Manasā is worshipped for three days beginning from the last day of Śrāvaṇa up to the second day of Bhādra of each year. A burnt-offering and the sacrifice of animals are performed on those days. Sometimes she is worshipped throughout the month of Śrāvaṇa and less commonly, of Bhādra.

It has been observed by K.K.Sen: "...another deity was important in many villages. This is 'Bisha-hari', another god who protected people from snakes. There was no image, but a hut sacred to him and surrounded by a line of plantain trees. Though such a hut was found almost in every village and worship of the god was apparently an important annual event, the villagers seemed a little ashamed of this deity and told me that it was the children who worshipped him."<sup>1</sup> We are told by our correspondents that Manasā is often worshipped in this district as Vishaharī, a name of Manasā found in our early texts. We have not been informed of the worship of a male deity with such a name either in this district or in any other district of undivided Bengal. Thus the separation of Manasā and Vishaharī, as noticed by Sen, seems strange and we have no

1. J.A.S.B., Vol. III (third series), pp. 25-36.

other evidence of this practice.

It is further observed by Sen that there are many huts which serve as permanent temples. Each hut contains an image of Manasā riding on a donkey with cobras by her side.<sup>1</sup> Bhattacharya identifies such an image as the image of Sitalā, the goddess of small-pox, whose vehicle is a donkey.<sup>2</sup> It is to be noted that Manasā, besides having power over snakes, is believed to be the cause of small-pox and cholera and she is often worshipped in many parts of Bengal for that purpose. In India the assimilation of the attributes of one divinity with those of the other is quite common. The presence of a donkey with the image of Manasā does not necessarily prove that the image is of Sitalā. The reason for the identification of these images as Sitalā suggested by Bhattacharya is not convincing, and a similar claim can be put forward in favour of Manasā on the ground of the presence of snakes. It is further interesting to note that in the district of Birbhum Manasā is worshipped by the name Sitalā.<sup>3</sup> Thus, though the attributes of the two are sometimes confused, there is no reason to identify these images as Sitalā in face of the current practice of worshipping them as Manasā.

1. Ibid., p. 35. B.

2. Folklore, Vol. 1, No. 4, p. 239.

3. See Appendix B., p. 520.

## II. Methods and Places of worship:

The methods and places of worship of Manasā in west Bengal are listed below in order of popularity.

### (A) Methods:

(i) The commonest method of Manasā worship is the use of a pot or pots, usually plain but sometimes engraved. This is the only method of her worship depicted in the Manasā-kāvyas.<sup>1</sup> It is to be noted in this connection that the Kumhars (the potter caste) of Bankura, Burdwan and Hooghly, who worship Manasā four times a year in the months of Māgha, Phālguna, Vaisākha and Śrāvaṇa,<sup>2</sup> manufacture thousands of engraved clay pots especially for the occasion of Manasā worship on the last day of Śrāvaṇa. These pots are known as Manasār-bāri (pots used for Manasā worship). The pots in their unburnt stage are often placed one upon the other and fixed together, making columns of pots, sometimes having as many as seven tiers.<sup>3</sup> The potters of Panchmuda in the district of Bankura are very famous for these symbols of Manasā (Plates - 23(a+b)+24). Though these pots are made on a commercial scale, they have the artistic quality of the best folk art, "the expression of the Bengali people themselves, of the rural millions who form the backbone of the nation. It

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1. Supra, p. Chapter V.

2. Risley, op.cit., Vol.1, p.523.

3. B.Ghose, Paśchim Bānger Samskriti, p.679.

is an art transmitted from generation without any essential changes, the roots reaching deep into the soil".<sup>1</sup> On the pots Manasā is represented both in theriomorphic and anthropomorphic form.

(ii) Next in importance is the worship of the goddess in the form of an earthen icon. The earliest reference to such worship occurs in the version of Ketakadās, though no description of the image is given.<sup>2</sup> Risley describes the type of image used in the late 19th century thus:

"... a four-armed effigy of the goddess, crowned by a tiara of snakes, grasping a cobra in each hand, and with her feet resting on a goose, is carried round the village with much discordant music; and finally thrown into a tank."<sup>3</sup> A similar practice is still current, with some additions and local variations.

The following observations are drawn from the present day earthen images, which are either four-armed or two-armed.

(a) The goddess is seated on a lotus or on a goose, or, less commonly, on a snake. Sometimes standing images of the goddess with the same seats as the seated figures are also found.

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1. A.C.Mukerjee, Folk Art of Bengal, p.1.

2. Supra, p. 401 .

3. Risley, op.cit., Vol.1, p.41; Cf., B.D.G. (Burdwan), p.55 and (Bankura), p.51.

(b) The goddess often wears a crown in the form of a cobra's head. In some case, besides this crown, another snake rises from the back of the image and spreads its hood over the goddess' head as a canopy. Images are also to be found without the crown and canopy.

(c) Snakes are sometimes used as the ornaments of the goddess, but ornaments of usual types are common.

(d) The attributes of the hands vary from place to place, but in all cases consist of some of the following: a snake or snakes, a lotus or lotuses, varada-mudrā, abhaya-mudrā, a discus, a conch-shell.

(e) Attendant figures - i) When there is one female attendant, the figure is said to be of Neto.  
 ii) The figures of Lakhindar and Behulā are caryed on the right and left sides of the goddess or vice versa (Plate- 17 ).  
 respectively/ iii) When there are two female figures on either side of the goddess, they are believed to be either Lakshmī and Sarasvatī in some places or Jayā and Bejayā in others. In the later case each of the attendants holds a chowrie. iv) In some cases the figures of Lakshmī and Gaṇeśa, and of Sarasvatī and Kārttikeya are found on the right and left side of the goddess respectively, (Plate - 18 ). v) Sometimes Lakhindar, Behulā and Neto appear together (Plate - 19 ). vi) Again, in some places



the attendant figures include Jaratkāru, Vāsuki, Āstika, Neto, Lakhindar and Behulā. In the village of Hadnara-yanpur, Bankura, a similar elaborate sculpture, but without the figure of Neto, is found. We have already mentioned that the members of the raj family of Jalpaiguri also display images illustrating the legend of Chāndo.<sup>1</sup> Images without any attendant figure are also frequently seen. However, the images are generally made in a very conventional manner, as in the cases of those of Lakshmī, Sarasvatī and similar devī images.

A peculiar type of image of the goddess is worshipped in the villages of Haldi, Chandipur, Santinandi and others in the district of Burdwan. The bust of the image is a four-armed human female and the lower part is serpentine. This type of clay image is made at Haldi and Chandipur.<sup>2</sup> It reminds us of the therio-anthropomorphic Nāga and Nāginī figures of early Indian sculpture. (iii) Manasā is also worshipped emblematically in the form of the si tree which is therefore also known as the Manasā tree in Bengal. This form of worship is no less prevalent in West Bengal than the worship of the earthen image, and is particularly popular among the womenfolk, who often plant

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1. Supra, p. 407 .

2. Sankarananda, op.cit., p.102.

twigs of sij on the courtyard or in the Tulsī-talā and worship them throughout the rainy season or on the days of Manasā worship. As already observed in the version of Bipradās it is said that Manasā is worshipped in the form of pots and a twig of sij.<sup>1</sup> Thus the twig of sij, which was worshipped together with the pots in the early period, has become an independent emblem in the present day worship. With the expansion of the cult both the early emblems of the goddess - the pots and the twig of sij - have been found representing her independently. Of course, in some places, both emblems are used, since they are easily available, though generally one or other is used alone. We have already seen the close association of snakes with trees.<sup>2</sup> This early belief still predominates in the cult of Manasā.

(iv) Like the grāmadevī and less commonly, the gramadevatā, Manasā is symbolically worshipped by a piece of stone or stones. This practice is current in most of the districts of west Bengal. These stones are often to be found lying under trees.

(v) In a few places images showing some connections with snakes are also worshipped as Manasā or Jagatgaurī, a name of Manasā.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Supra, pp. 138, 140 f.

2. Supra, pp. 70-72.

3. Supra, pp. 350-351.

(vi) She is also symbolically worshipped either by a paṭa (a painting of Manasā and other figures of the legend on paper or pith)<sup>1</sup> or by a picture printed on paper. The printed pictures are of two types. In the first the goddess (Plate - 25. ) is seated on a full-blown lotus with her right leg bent and her left one resting on a lotus. She is four-armed and holds a snake in each hand. Her head is canopied by five snake hoods and on the pedestal the tail of a single snake is seen, giving the impression that the snake hoods belong to it.

The second type (Plate - 26. ) is the detailed representation of the important events of the principal legend. These are four different phases - a) In the upper right corner of the picture is the scene of the construction of the sealed-chamber, under the direction of Chāṇḍo; b) the upper left represents the bed chamber of Behulā and Lakhindar (inside the sealed-chamber) and the attempt of Behulā to catch the snake Kālī with a fork after it had bitten Lakhindar; c) the lower left shows the daring journey of Behula with the corpse of her husband in order to bring him back to life and d) lastly the lower right represents the final surrender of Chāṇḍo, who

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1. ~~Infra~~, pp. 442-443.

offers flowers in his left hand. In the middle of this picture is the figure of a four-armed goddess seated on a lotus. She has a canopy of five snake hoods and holds a snake in each hand.

Sometimes these symbols are used at the worship of Manasā along with a pot or pots. They are very rare in comparison with other methods and confined to a few places. Other local methods of worship, as already observed in Uttarbhag,<sup>1</sup> are also current.

#### B. Places:

(i) Manasā is commonly worshipped near a tree or bush, which may be a siṃ, a banyan, a fig or a tulsī planted either in the courtyard or very close to the house.

(ii) She is also worshipped in the home, in that room which is reserved for common worship and other family rites, or sometimes near the hearth or oven, at the time of the vrata rite and the Arandhana ceremony.

(iii) There are permanent shrines of Manasā, which are mostly thatched huts. Sometimes she is worshipped in a shrine known as pūjā-maṇḍapa<sup>2</sup> used for the worship of other deities. At the time of bāroyārī pūjā she is

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1. Supra, pp. 414-415.

2. Supra, p. 276 . (footnote).

worshipped in a temporary pavilion in the village square.

(iv) In a few places of the districts of Hooghly and West-Dinajpur, her worship takes place on the bank of a river. In the latter place this worship is known as Mār-pūjā (probably a corruption of the word Mārī or Mari, meaning a pestilence and a plague). It is reported that Manasā is worshipped by similar names such as Māraki, Morakī, Mārāi and Māreyā in West Bengal and Mārai in Assam, all of which seem to be local variations of Mārī or Mari.<sup>1</sup> In Assam this origin of the name is evident, as Manasā is worshipped there by the name Mārai only when an epidemic breaks out. In Bengal the proper meaning of the name has been forgotten.

### III. Priestly functions and sacrificial offerings.

#### A. Priestly functions:

The priestly functions are performed by i) the Brahman priests in the case of upper classes, ii) the Deyāsīs among the lower classes mostly only semi-Hinduised, iii) family heads in some families of the lower classes, iv) by elderly women at vrata rites<sup>2</sup> and v) by the caste priest among some castes.

1. For the etymology of Mārai in Assam see Journal, University of Gauhati, XI: Science, No.2, 1960, pp.59-60.

2. Infra., pp. 476, 480 - 481.

It is observed: "The ministrants of the village gods in West Bengal who are known as Deyasis come from the lower castes, e.g. Dom, Hārī, Bāgdī, Bāuri, Keyāt, Māl and similar others; there being no sacerdotal class exclusively assigned with this duty. Orthodox Brahmin priests dissociate themselves from this function. But in certain areas their services are requisitioned if available, only on special occasions ... As a matter of fact Brahmins are generally permitted to worship the village gods in their own way if they so desire on their own behalf. But the right of public worship is always retained by the Deyasi families. There is no bar, however, for any woman against acting as Deyasi ... Due to the growing influence of Hinduism over the whole area the Deyasis have been using the surnames of the cast Hindus, and sometimes even of the Brahmins, in (sic) some places. Sometimes Brahmins of noble birth are also attracted to this profession through poverty, though at a considerable loss to their social status.

In more Hinduized villages the functions of the Deyasi and the priest have been bifurcated ... there are many shrines in which Brahmins act as priests, but the proprietary rights are retained by the Deyasis".<sup>1</sup>

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1. Man in India, Vol.35, No.1, pp.27-28.

In the case of Manasā, the priestly function is invariably performed by the Deyāsīs in the districts of Bankura, Birbhum, 24-Parganas and some parts of Burdwan. Many tribes and castes perform the priestly function among themselves, or in other ways.

Among the Lodhās only the Gunnins or Ojhās of their own community perform the priestly function in different villages with the sacrifice of goats or pigeons, to make snakes lose their poison.<sup>1</sup> The Pauras of Bengal perform the worship through their caste priests.<sup>2</sup> The Rajbamsīs have their own priests who have acquired a reputation for their sanctity. Sometimes Brahman priests are also employed.<sup>3</sup> Similar is the case with the Lohārs.<sup>4</sup> The Māls or snake-catchers who have made snakes "the object of their peculiar study" and play a great rôle on the days of Manasā worship,<sup>5</sup> have not yet attained to the dignity of employing Brahmans in most districts, and elders of the caste or headmen of villages serve them as priests (khāmid).<sup>6</sup> Another type of snake-catcher is the Sāmpurīā, one of the groups of

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1. Ibid., Vol.37, No.3, pp.211, 213.
  2. Modern Review, November issue, 1961, p.406.
  3. Risley, op.cit., Vol.1, p.499.
  4. Ibid., Vol.II, p.23.
  5. Calcutta Review, Vol.XVIII, July-Dec., pp.55ff.
  6. Risley, op.cit., Vol.II, p.49.

Bediyā. Like the Māls, they also have the same rôle at the festival of Manasā.<sup>1</sup> In the village of Masuria, Midnapur, they employ Vaishnavas to perform the rites of Manasā. We have not been informed of such a practice in other districts of Bengal. The employment of the Vaishnavas as priests is a peculiar custom which suggests the strong foothold of Vaishnavism in that locality in general and among them in particular. No doubt this is a local origin.

B. Sacrificial offerings:

The common offerings include milk, plantain, incense, sandal, lighted lamps, rice, various fruits, goats, sheep, pigeons, ducks, buffalos (in the case of mānat)<sup>2</sup> and pigs (only among the aboriginals). The offerings, which are basically the same as those referred to in the early versions of the Manasākāvyas are more or less the same throughout Bengal. Among the Vaishnavas, who object to animal sacrifices, pumpkins and other vegetables are sacrificed before the goddess, in contrast to the Śākta practice of animal sacrifice. Animal sacrifice is rare among the higher classes except during

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1. Ibid., Vol. 1, p. 84.

2. This is a special vow. People especially the women-folk make mānat, promising offerings to the goddess to invoke her aid for overcoming dangers and calamities and to obtain desired objects.



the time of mānat. Animals are usually slaughtered by men of low origin who are employed by the community or individual families.

#### IV. Purposes of worship:

Besides the goddess of snakes Manasā is worshipped as the following purposes.

(i) Fertility goddess - The early association of snakes with the fertility cult has already been discussed.<sup>1</sup>

Manasā also inherited power over fertility. In some places of Bengal she is worshipped by women in order to produce children.<sup>2</sup> In the early versions of the kāvyas it is said that a childless person gets a child if he or she worships her.<sup>3</sup> It is also said that Jālu and Mālu<sup>4</sup> and Sanakā<sup>5</sup> were blessed with children by Manasā when they worshipped the goddess. This idea of her power over fertility is well manifested at the practice of her worship before a marriage ceremony, which is performed in many places of West Bengal.<sup>6</sup> The rite observed by the Suvarṇabaniks (a section of merchant class) of Birbhum deserves special mention.

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1. Supra, Ch. 4, pp. 12-15, 66-70.
  2. L.Nos., 4 (Hooghly), 17, 22, 35 (Birbhum), 2, 6 (Malda)
  3. Bipradas, op.cit., pp. 62-63; Bamśīdās, op.cit., p. 126.
  4. Jagajjīban, op.cit., p. 107.
  5. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., pp. 64, 65, 102, 104-105.
  6. L.Nos., 26 (Birbhum), 1 (Darjeeling), 1, 6, 9, 16 (Jalpaiguri); B.D.G., (Birbhum), p. 33; A.Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp. 215-216.

Among them a marriage rite is observed which is known as Gāchhabera, meaning winding threads round a tree. This rite centering on Manasā is observed on the day of marriage, on the day before, or on the day of pātrāharidrā - a rite of smearing turmeric paste on the body of the bride or the groom. Two or three days before the observance of this rite either the image or the symbolic representation of the goddess Manasā is brought from the permanent shrine, is placed in the house and is thought to reside there for eight days. A party of professional singers consisting of five members is engaged by the family and throughout the period of the residence of the goddess, songs of Manasā are recited by the party every evening in her honour. On the day of the observance of the rite of Gāchhabera both the groom and the bride fast. In the morning some rites, among them ritual gambling, are observed by elderly women. At noon a large procession moves from the house to observe the actual rite. In front of the procession moves the party of singers and behind the party is the Deyāśī carrying the image or symbol of the goddess in his arms. At his side walks a Brahman priest. A few married women, who are well dressed and ornamented, also follow them carrying pitchers on their arms. A

girl or boy throws parched corn on the streets. Among the married women are the groom, carrying either a mirror or a fork, and the bride carrying a kājalalatā, a spoon-like iron vessel in which stibium to paint the eyes is prepared. The bride also pulls a small wooden boat in her left hand (presumably with the help of a rope) and rolls a coconut in the street with her right hand. In this way the procession marches forward, with pauses when the songs of Manasā are recited in order to cheer the public. At the same time the old women buy flowers or bel leaves at a nominal price from the priest and a few of them bow down to the goddess. The most notable feature of this ritual is bhar.<sup>1</sup> Among the married women who participate, one is believed to be inspired by the goddess, and the priest asks her whether any mistakes ~~have~~ been committed by him at this rite. It is commonly believed that she serves as the mouthpiece of the goddess and if she says that a mistake has been made, she also prescribes the means of counteracting it. In many parts of West Bengal it is believed that an inspired man or woman has the power of foretelling the future and persons suffering from diseases ask them when they will

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1. Supra, p. 395 .

be cured or not. This practice is also current in South India.<sup>1</sup>

At last the procession reaches a fig tree at the corner of the village and for some time songs are sung. The groom, the bride and the married women move round the tree which is entwined with threads. Then the procession returns to the house, the goddess is replaced on her original throne and once more the songs are recited.<sup>2</sup> A similar elaborate rite is observed by other castes.<sup>3</sup>

(ii) Curer of diseases - Manasā is worshipped to avert epidemics such as cholera and small-pox in the districts of Birbhum, Bankura and Murshidabad.<sup>4</sup> When she is worshipped in this aspect, she is known as Śītalā in some places.<sup>5</sup> When an epidemic breaks out, the goddess is ceremonially worshipped, as well as Śītalā, the presiding deity of small-pox and cholera. Sometimes during the epidemic a Deyāśī, from a nearby village, is asked to come to a village where there is no permanent shrine of the

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1. Infra, pp. 469-470.

2. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp. 215-216. The author's description is confusing. In the beginning he writes that the rite is observed either on the day of marriage or the day before marriage or on the day of gātraharidrā but in the description we find that both the bride and the groom observe the rite together. It seems unusual that the bride and the groom together observe a rite before their marriage but it may be the case that this rite is observed in the families both of bride and groom.

3. L.No., 26 (Birbhum).

4. L.Nos., 29 (Bankura), 2, 4, 6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 15, 18, 22, 23, 26, 27, 28, 30, 33, 37, 40 (Birbhum), 20 (Murshidabad).

5. Appendix - B, p. 520.

goddess, mainly because of her reputation as a curer of epidemics. The Deyāśī comes to the village with the image of the goddess or with her symbolic representation which he carries on his head (Plate- 27). From this tour, which may last for a day or two or sometimes longer, the Deyāśī earns considerable fees both in cash and in kind.

In some places of West Bengal<sup>1</sup> Manasā is worshipped as the curer of incurable diseases in particular and other diseases in general. Quack medicines are distributed in the name of the goddess in various villages such as Vedo and Hirapur in Howrah,<sup>2</sup> Haripal and Rasulpur in Hooghly and in the districts of Birbhum and Murshidabad in general.

In the early versions of the kāvyas it is said that the goddess cures diseases if she is worshipped, and even that there will be no diseases among the persons who worship her.<sup>3</sup> In South India it is believed that earth from holes inhabited by the snakes had the special power of curing the diseases and removing barrenness. It is believed "to cleanse from leprosy if rubbed on the parts affected and to remove the stigma of barrenness from women

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1. L.Nos., 17, 18, 32 (Birbhum), 4, 12 (Hooghly), 11 (Jalpaiguri), 6 (Murshidabad), 11 (Howrah).
  2. Supra, p. 405.
  3. Bipradās, op.cit., p. 63; Bamsīdās, op.cit., p. 126.

if a little be daily put in the mouth".<sup>1</sup> Thus it would appear that a widespread primitive belief about the curative value of snakes has been incorporated with Manasā in a changed form.

(iii) Rain giver - In some places Manasā is worshipped in connection with rain-making rites.<sup>2</sup> Swami Sankarananda has tried to establish that Manasā was originally worshipped as a goddess of rain and that the power of controlling snakes was ascribed to her later.<sup>3</sup> His hypothesis has not been substantiated by arguments stronger than those which can be put forward against it. We have already seen that in the early period Nāgas or Nāginīs, who were conceived of as snake spirits, were also worshipped as water spirits, and later this aspect of their character further developed.<sup>4</sup> Probably the same belief has consciously or unconsciously led to the association of Manasā with water.

(iv) Wealth giver - As already observed snakes are believed to be the guardians of treasures.<sup>5</sup> Probably out

1. Vogel, op.cit., p.273.
2. L.Nos., 6 (Birbhum), 7 (Burdwan).
3. Sankarananda, op.cit., pp.68-104.
4. Supra, pp. 61-64 .
5. Supra, pp. 70 . .

of this early belief the goddess of snakes is worshipped in many places of Bengal in order to obtain wealth.<sup>1</sup>

References to the goddess as a wealth giver occur in the early versions of her legend.<sup>2</sup>

(v) Tutelary goddess. - From our investigations it appears that the people of some castes such as the Bāgdi, Bāuri, Māl, Sāmpuriā, and Kaibarttas or Kewāt<sup>3</sup> worship Manasā more enthusiastically than other castes in general. All but the last of the castes mentioned consider the goddess as their special deity.<sup>4</sup> The Kaibarttas do not claim her as such, as they obtained a social status a few centuries earlier than the other castes in question.<sup>5</sup> It should be noted that ethnographically all these castes belong to the same group. M.L.Singha writes that "Manasā is worshipped as the tutelary deity of those people, who engage mostly in fishing and boating. They are mainly Kewats, Bāgdīs and Jeles (fishermen castes). Manasā was first worshipped by the people of these castes who lived on the bank of the Kāsāi river and then these people migrated by way of the river to eastern and northern Bengal taking

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1. L.Nos., 12 (Bankura), 6,35 (Birbhum), 6 (Cooch-Behar), 4 (Hooghly), 10 (Jalpaiguri), 2,4,6 (Malda), 39 (Midnapur), 5 (Nadia), 3 (24-Parganas).
  2. Bipradās, op.cit., pp.62,63; Bamśīdās, op.cit., p.126.
  3. Buchanan is of the opinion that "the Kewats of Behar and the Kaibarttas of Bengal belonged in the earliest times to one aboriginal tribe bearing the name Kewat, and that the Sanskrit name Kaibartta might 'have been adopted when Ballal Sen raised the tribe to the rank of purity '" (Quoted by Risley, op.cit., Vol.1, p.454).
  4. Cf., Risley, op.cit., Vol.1, pp.41,80,84; Vol.II, p.49; Calcutta Review, vol.XVIII, pp.556f; B.D.G. (Bankura), p.51; (Burdwan) p.55.
  5. Risley, op.cit., Vol.1, pp.375-382.





sunned rice, tulsi leaves, resin, incense and unboiled milk".

"Further in Rāḍha the names of the snakes are native words, - Keute, Dhonrā, Borā, Dhyāmnā, Chiti, etc..... The caste name Keut or Kewat and the snake Keute seem to have a common origin. Again among the Bāuris there is a group which bears the gotra chiti s̄ap (the snake Chiti). The evidence suggests that the ancestors of the above mentioned castes were the founders of the cult of Manasā."<sup>1</sup>

These observations need some elaboration. The view that the cult of Manasā developed on the riverside of Kāsāi among the castes in question can be substantiated by further observations. The Kasai or Kansabati takes its rise in the extreme west in the hills north of Jhalda in the district of Manbhum and then runs through the districts of Bankura and Midnapur. Finally it meets the river Haldi. The population of Bankura and Midnapur consists largely of people of castes such as Bāgdī and Bāuri in the former district and Kaibarttas (Māhisya) in the latter district.<sup>2</sup> These people still worship the

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1. From an unpublished Bengali manuscript, written on the culture of Rāḍha by Manik Lal Singha.
  2. B.D.G. (Bankura) p.57; Ibid., (Midnapur), p. 57.

goddess with great pomp and grandeur. As in Bankura there is a song current at the time of worship among the people of Midnapur who live on the bank of the river Silai or Silabati. It is as follows:<sup>1</sup>

māke ānte jābare śilāi nadīr kul /  
māyer pāye diba rāngā jabā, hāte diba phul //

"We will go to bring our mother (Manasā) on the bank of the river Silai and offer red jaba flowers to her feet and flowers (in general) to her hands".

The river Silai or Silabati rises in the Manbhum and it has a short course in the south of Bankura before it passes into Midnapur where it joins Dhalkisor. It is reported that the goddess is more widely and enthusiastically worshipped on the bank of the river in Midnapur than in other places of the same district.<sup>2</sup>

The above facts encourage us to believe that these riverside areas in particular and the districts of Bankura and Midnapur in general were the early centres of the cult. Thus the hypothesis of Singha deserves consideration.

Other points should be considered in this connection. The native names of the snakes are of interest from an

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1. S.P.P. Vol.XXXVII, No.4, pp.187ff.
  2. Ibid.

anthropological viewpoint. Possibly they originated out of the tribal names of the people who worshipped a particular category of snakes as their totems. We have already observed the possibility of the common origin of the caste name Keut or Kewāt and the snake Keute and the existence of Chiti s̄ap gotra of the Baurīs. A similar type of association is also found. There are tribes entitled 'Boda', a sub-caste of the Kochh in northern and eastern Bengal and 'Borā', a totemistic sect of Chiks in Chota Nagpur.<sup>1</sup> It is possible that there was some totemistic connection between these tribes and the snake 'Borā'. These facts suggest that the native names of the snakes originated from the totemistic beliefs of tribes bearing similar names. As totemism is found only among the non-Aryan tribes and chiefly among the Dravidians,<sup>2</sup> so it is likely that these names of snakes originated among non-Aryan and Dravidian people.

Hence it seems to us that the founders of the cult of Manasā were the ancestors of these castes such as Bāgdīs, Baurīs, and Kaibarttas or Kewāts, who originally gained their livelihood from fishing and boating. Probably

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1. Risley op.cit., Vol.1.pp.

2. E.R.E., Vol.XII,p.397.

for this reason these caste people still worship the goddess more enthusiastically than others and consider her as their special deity.

(vi) Grāmadevī - Manasā is worshipped as a village goddess before any auspicious rite, such as the sacred thread ceremony or the ceremony of putting rice into an infant's mouth for the first time, is observed.<sup>1</sup> In the village of Jayakrishnapur, Bankura, it is strongly believed that, before any auspicious rite is performed, the head of the family concerned should ask permission from the goddess. For this a rite known as Eyoyātrā or Eyoyāt is observed. At this rite nine married women, selected and arranged by the family concerned, go to the shrine of the goddess from the house of the family which observes the rite. They come with offerings, which especially include sweetened parched paddy, and they take it in the end of their garments. Finally they return to the place where the ceremony is being arranged.

(vii) Other aspects - Manasā is worshipped (a) as the result of the fulfilment of a desire,<sup>2</sup> (b) for the general welfare of the family<sup>3</sup> and (c) very rarely as the

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1. L.Nos. 26 (Bankura), 6, 13 (Jalpaiguri).
  2. L.Nos., 5, 12, 14 (Bankura), 7, 11 (Birbhum), 1 (Hooghly), 1, 2 (Malda).
  3. L.Nos., 20 (Bankura), 5 (Cooch-Bihar), 2, (Darjeeling), 4, 8 (Hooghly), 3, 10, 17 (Howrah), 2, 3, 5, 12, 13 (Jalpaiguri), 2, 10, 18 (Malda), 48 (Midnapur), 6 (Nadia).

protector of children.<sup>1</sup> In the village of Vedo, Howrah, mothers, anxious for the wellbeing of their children, make mānat to the goddess. When the children are one or two years' old, the mothers come to the shrine to offer the first hair of their children, shaving their heads in the courtyard of the shrine of the goddess. This ceremony is elaborately performed. The children are believed to be protected by the goddess and they are called Manasā-charan, 'the slave of Manasā'.

Thus, besides the primary function of Manasā as the goddess of snakes, she is worshipped for other purposes and her cult is really an extensive one.

#### Districts of East Bengal:<sup>2</sup>

As in West Bengal, in East Bengal the cult of Manasā was very popular before the partition of 1947. Now more than 90 per cent of the population is Muslims and the popularity of the cult is very low among the Hindus. As our local survey has been made only in West Bengal, the detailed study of East Bengal is not possible. As regards East Bengal the periods and days, methods, places and purposes of worship and the priestly functions and

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1. L.No., 12 (Hooghly).

2. In the present terminology East Bengal comprises those districts of Bengal which are now under the territory of Pakistan.

sacrificial offerings have been treated together while tracing the popularity of the cult district-wise. It can be reasonably assumed that most of the rites and practices described were strictly observed before partition. The antiquity of many of them may be gathered from the texts written in East Bengal and the evidence has already been quoted in relation to West Bengal.

### 1. Bakarganj

An early account records that "the only peculiarity requiring special mention among the religious ceremonies of the Hindus of Bakarganj is the special reverence they pay to Manasā, ... who is always represented among the family idols".<sup>1</sup> In the present day it is reported that the goddess still enjoys almost the same popularity among the Hindus. She is ceremonially worshipped on the last day of Śrāvaṇa. The worship is commonly known as Paṭa-Vishaharī and is performed without any image.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately the author has failed to mention how the goddess is symbolized at this type of worship. It seems to us that she is represented by a paper or a model in pith (śolā) in the shape of a small house painted with

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1. W.W.Hunter, A Statistical Account of Bengal, Vol.V,p.196; cf., B.D.G. (Bakarganj), p.36.
  2. Folklore, Vol. II, No.1,p.44.

pictures of deities and figure in the Manasā legend, principally of the goddess herself. This sort of worship, known as Paṭa-pūjā, is current in Midnapur, Jalpaiguri, Malda, Howrah and Cooch-Bihar. As she is symbolized by the paṭa, she seems to have become known as Paṭa-Vishaharī in these circles.

Sometimes a pot is installed on the first day of Śrāvana and the people continue to worship her with this symbol throughout the month. On the last day the pot is immersed with great pomp. Besides this, the people also observe the Nāgapañchamī. On this occasion clay images of snakes having no connection with Manasā are worshipped.<sup>1</sup> This is a peculiar custom which is not found in West Bengal.

An elaborate worship known as Rayānī pūjā is arranged when clay images of the goddess and other chief characters of the principal legend are made and worshipped. This sort of worship is the outcome of a fulfilment of a mental vow made by the head of the family when a male child is born, and is observed at the time of his marriage or, in the case of a Brahman, at the sacred thread ceremony. This worship continues for five days

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1. Ibid., pp. 44-45.

or two and a half days according to the promise of the person who makes the vow. During these days songs of Manasā are recited.<sup>1</sup>

There is a permanent shrine on the east bank of a big tank in the village of Gaila. It is popularly believed that the 15th century poet Bijaya Gupta, who was born in this village, erected this shrine of Manasā, where a bronze image is installed. The goddess of this shrine is a very popular one and the people from far and wide come to offer her pūjā for various reasons, especially for the cure of diseases. When the people assemble a fair is held on the other three banks of the tank. The Chāṇḍālas who reside nearby are believed to be the sons of Manasā, the choosen caste of the goddess. This belief came into being from the traditions of the worship of Manasā by the cowherd Laik, a member of this caste.<sup>2</sup>

## 2. Bogra

It has been recorded by an early 20th century author that "the goddess Manasā is worshipped here, as in other parts of Bengal, at the time of Ambubāchi in

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1. Folklore, Vol.II, No.1, p.46.
  2. P.Dasgupta, Ed., Bijaya Gupta's Padmapurāṇa, Intro., pp.15-16; S.P.P., Vol.III, 2nd issue, 1303, B.S., p.135; L.No., 7 (24-Parganas).



Ashār ... A particularly interesting ceremony relating to the snake-goddess Manasā is observed among the lower classes of people in this district, chiefly by the Bunās in Pānchbībī. This festival is known as the Khora pūjā. Manasā is worshipped under a plantain tree and a preliminary ceremony known as bish upājān (transferring poison from one place to another) has to be performed. It is believed that by the incantations of the worshippers, poison is transferred from a snake into a plantain tree".<sup>1</sup> In the present day worship no peculiar features are found here. This district is largely influenced by the adjoining districts of east and west.<sup>2</sup>

### 3. Chittagong

The goddess is still popular in this district and is worshipped ceremonially on the last day of Śrāvaṇa. Daily offerings are made throughout this month and on the last day two more pots of different shape are added to the previous pair. A twig of siḥ is also planted there. No image or idol is used. After the final worship these pots are not immersed, but are kept for

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1. Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gazetteers (Bogra), p.38.
  2. Folklore, Vol.II, No.1, p.46.

household purposes. Manasā is worshipped in the form of an earthen image only on the occasion of a vow by an individual or a family.<sup>1</sup>

In the village of Suchakradandi there is a shrine known as the shrine of Jalkumārī. Five images are installed there; one of them represents Manasā. The goddess Jalkumārī, represented by an image, is believed to be the goddess of smallpox. Daily worship is performed in this shrine, which is visited by a good number of votaries even today.<sup>2</sup> Here Manasā worship is not of any special importance, as she is worshipped together with the other four deities, and the shrine is particularly known as the shrine of Jalkumārī.

Besides the worship of Manasā as a safeguard against snake bite, she is also worshipped for the purpose of recovery from diseases in general.<sup>3</sup>

#### 4. Dacca.

In Dacca the goddess was very enthusiastically worshipped before partition. The methods of worship

- 
1. Ibid., pp. 43-44.
  2. Ibid., pp. 41, 44.
  3. Folklore, Vol. II, No. 1, p. 44.

among the Suvarnabaniks of this district have been recorded by Risley: "Manasā Devī is propitiated with great ceremony, and on the Bhagīratha Dasharā a branch of 'sij' ('Euphorbia ligularia), sacred to the 'goddess of snakes' is planted in the courtyard, and on every Panchamī or fifth lunar day of each fortnight up to the Dasharā of the Durgā Pūjah, the Sonars make offering to it. On the great day of the feast, the Vijaya Dasamī, the plant is plucked up and thrown into the river."<sup>1</sup> The same writer recorded: "...no class is more strict in attending to the details of her worship than the Kulin Brahmans of Bikrampur in Dacca".<sup>2</sup> The cult still enjoys popularity, but not so great as it did. The goddess worshipped with rites similar to that of Bakarganj.<sup>3</sup> In Vikrampur daily worship is performed in a shrine known as Manasābārī (i.e., the house of Manasā).<sup>4</sup> The vrata of Manasā was widely observed by the people of Manikganj subdivision.<sup>5</sup> The boat racing ceremony on the Dacca river held in honour of Manasā is an occasion of much gaiety.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Risley, op.cit., Vol.II, p.264.

2. Ibid., Vol.I, p.41.

3. Folklore, Vol.II, No.1, pp.44-45; Supra, pp. 442-444.

4. Ibid., p.41.

5. SPP., Vol.IX, 2nd issue, p.109.

6. Quoted by Risley, op.cit., Vol.1, p.187.

### 5. Faridpur

The worship of Manasā is observed here in a manner similar to that of Bakarganj and Dacca, as these three districts form a distinct cultural and social unit.<sup>1</sup> The upper classes of this district observe the rites of Manasā with great pomp and grandeur. The members of the Gandhabanik caste worship the goddess in the form of images and the worship continues for three days. White goats are very carefully nourished in this district, as they are believed to be the sacrificial victims most favoured by the goddess.<sup>2</sup>

### 6 & 7. Jessore and Khulna

These two districts have been much influenced by the surrounding districts both east and west. There is little or no difference in the ritualistic observances of Manasā worship between them and the adjoining districts.<sup>3</sup> It is reported that in the village of Dingadahat in Jhenida subdivision, a large fair is held just after the day of Manasā worship. The famous Ojhās and the Sānpuriās from this district and the adjoining ones assemble on the day of the fair with cages and vessels

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1. Folklore, Vol.II, No.1, pp.44-45.
  2. L.No. 7 (24-Parganas).
  3. Folklore, Vol.II, No.1, p.46.

containing venomous snakes. Either in the middle or in any corner of the ground where the fair is held, a raised stage is made. A veteran ojhā is instructed to sit there. The other assembled ojhās make circles at a distance of from 3 to 4 ft. from the stage. Then each ojhā sits within his circle, takes out a snake from a cage, utters mantras and lets it crawl about. He continues this until he has taken out all his snakes from their cages or vessels. The motive behind this practice is to display their powers against one another. The snakes of one ojhā are allowed to attack the others, and it is believed that they cannot cross the circle round each ojhā, if it is protected by a sufficiently powerful mantra. Each ojhā applies his mantra-śakti or incantation to protect himself from the attacks of the others' snakes, and he too tries to attack the others with his snakes. That ojhā is honoured as superior to the others whose snake crosses a circle and bites another ojhā. When an ojhā is bitten by a snake, he tries himself to transfer or remove the poison from his body. If he fails to do so, the senior ojhā comes down from the stage and cures him. In most cases the snakes do not cross the circles made by the ojhās. Often three or four hissing snakes are allowed to crawl about at these contests. This fair is so famous

that more than eight thousand people assemble to witness the display of snakes.<sup>1</sup>

### 8. Mymensingh

An account written early in the present century gives the following picture of Manasā worship in this district, especially in its eastern part. Here Manasā is very popular among both Hindus and Muslims. The Padmāpurāṇa of Nārāyaṇ Deb, an inhabitant of this district, is very well known among them. This book serves as the means of maintaining friendly relationships among all the classes of the population. The Muslim disciples of the Hindu ojhās enthusiastically recite Narayan Deb's songs of Manasā.<sup>2</sup> On the day of Manasā worship both Hindus and Muslims enjoy boat races, which are very famous.<sup>3</sup> A vrata of Manasā was widely observed in the Tangail subdivision.<sup>4</sup> These early 20th century accounts suggest that this district has long been a great centre of the cult, which was followed there at least as early as the 14th-15th century A.D., when the poet is believed to have composed his songs.

It has recently been observed that each family of

- 
1. L.No., 4 (West Dinajpur).
  2. S.P.P.R., Vol.VI, 2nd issue, p.80.
  3. B.D.G., (Mymensingh), p.36; S.P.P., Vol.XXXIX, 1339 B.S., 3rd issue, p.220.
  4. S.P.P., Vol.IX, 2nd issue, 1309, B.S., p.109.

the eastern part of this district worships the goddess individually in the form of a two-armed or sometimes four-armed earthen image on the last day of Śrāvaṇa.

On either side of the image clay snakes are found spreading their hoods. Goats and pigeons are sacrificed by Śaivas and Śāktas on this occasion, while Vaiṣṇavas sacrifice sugarcane, pumpkin and other vegetables.

Before the immersion ceremony of the image is performed on the following day, the earthen snakes on the shoulders of the image are removed and kept in the house as it is believed that "the dried earth of these clay snakes is an infallible remedy of many incurable diseases, specially children's diseases".<sup>1</sup>

Sometimes a karandī is also added at this worship and sometimes, again, it is taken as the emblem of the goddess and worshipped alone.

This karandī is in the form of a small house made of pith (śolā). On the outer walls are painted the figures of snakes, of the snake goddess and of other characters and incidents of the legends. In both the types of worship ālpanās or drawings, mostly representing snakes and the chief incidents of the legend, are drawn.<sup>2</sup>

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1. Folklore, Vol.II, No.1, pp.41-42.

2. Folklore, Vol.II, No.1, pp.41ff.

## 9. Noakhali

It has been recorded that "in the rains, when snakes are plentiful, there is a Nāg Pūja or serpent worship. In other parts of Bengal the serpent is worshipped in the name of Manasā Devī, a branch of the manasā plant being the symbol of the snake; but that is not so in Noākhāli."<sup>1</sup> It has recently been reported that Manasā is ceremonially worshipped on the last day of Srāvaṇa, though her worship actually starts from the first day of this month. The methods of worship are similar to those of Chittagong.<sup>2</sup> Thus the accounts suggest that the actual worship of snakes, and the worship of Manasā are current in this district.

## 10. Pabna

This district has been greatly influenced by the adjoining districts of Murshidabad, Nadia, Dacca and Mymensingh and the rituals of Manasā observed there are similar to those of the districts situated nearby. It is reported that the women folk of a particular village assemble at the public place of worship, and under a sij tree, clay images of snakes are placed on the last day

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1. Eastern Bengal and Assam District Gasetteers (Noakhali) p.35.
  2. Folklore, Vol.II, No.1, pp.43-44; Supra, Ch.VIII, pp.445f.



Śrāvāṇa. Offerings are made before the clay images. Paintings of snakes are drawn on a piece of cloth dyed in saffron which is hung on the sij tree on this day.<sup>1</sup> We cannot believe that this is the only form of worship. Other methods must also be observed, though we have not been able to gather details of the rites.

#### 11 & 12. Rajshahi and Rangpur

In Rajshahi the goddess is worshipped by all Hindus. She is commonly worshipped under a sij tree in the form of an unburnt earthen pot on the Nāgapañchamī and on the last day of Śrāvāṇa. Sometimes earthen images are used at her worship. Very rarely she is worshipped communally, either in the shrine of Śiva or in that of Kālī. In many places of this district fairs are held on the occasion of Manasā worship.<sup>2</sup>

In the district of Rangpur the Rājbaṁsīs constitute the bulk of the Hindu population. Though they profess to be Vaishṇavas, they practice many aboriginal rites and worship many local gods, including Manasā, who is worshipped by the name of Vishaharī.<sup>3</sup> As in many other districts her worship is held on the last day of Śrāvāṇa. Fairs are often held in the districts of Rajshahi, Rangpur, Bogra and

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1. Folklore, Vol.II, No.1, p.46.

2. For this information we are indebted to Mr.D.K.Chakravarti, Asst.Curator, Varendra Research Society Museum, Rajshahi.

3. Eastern Bengal & Assam District Gazetteers (Rangpur), pp.44-45.

Dinaajpur after the day or days of Manasā worship. The special attraction of such fairs is the exhibition of the powers of the ojhās who assemble there from different parts of Bengal. The ojhās plant a plantain tree in one corner of the fair-ground. They place a pot containing water and a twig of sij or another tree under the newly planted tree. Then a mantra is pronounced over the pot. The principal ojhā makes a circle, locally known as chākal, in front of the tree. Within this circle ten or twelve persons from among the crowd, locally known as pātās, are asked to sit. Then the assembled ojhās utter mantras invoking Vishaharī or Manasā and by this practice they produce effects similar to those of snake-venom in the bodies of the people sitting in the circle. A man's hands begin to tremble as soon as he is affected. As soon as one ojhā has "poisoned" a victim, another tries to destroy the effects of the "poison". This practice continues turn by turn. An ojha who is able to affect a man and to compel him to come from the circle, and then to cure him by removing the influence from his body, is highly respected by the others. The participants in these remarkable displays of the hypnotic powers of the ojhās are both the Hindus and the Muslims.<sup>1</sup>

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1. L.No., 4 (West Dinaajpur).

## B. Tripura:

In this state Manasā is widely worshipped, though there are some differences in the ritualistic observances in different parts of the area. The rites and practices observed in the north and south-west parts of this state (Chandpur subdivision), are similar to those of east Mymensingh and Chittagong respectively.<sup>1</sup> The goddess is worshipped throughout the month of Śrāvaṇa, and a special ceremony in her honour is performed on the last day of this month. The Malos (fisherman caste) observe a peculiar mock marriage rite which is very similar to the practice observed in Nadia.<sup>2</sup> Each family arranges to read the Padmāpurāṇa throughout the whole of the month of Śrāvaṇa, and on the last day Manasā is worshipped. Her worship is followed by the performance of a mock-marriage between two unmarried girls; the rite is popularly known as jālā-biyā. The main requirement of this is seedlings or sprouts of paddy, called jālā. One girl stands over a small stool and enacts the part of the bridegroom and another girl, holding a pot containing the seedlings, moves round the "groom" seven times as the "bride". At each circumambulation, when the "bride" stands in front of

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1. Folklore, Vol. II, No. 1, pp. 41-44; For the rites and practices see Supra, pp. 445-446, 450-451.
  2. Supra, Ch. VIII, p. 23. pp. 411-413

the "groom", she removes all the seedlings from the pot and replaces them. Throughout the ceremony the women-folk sing songs.<sup>1</sup> It would appear that the jālā biyā is a regular feature of the local Manasā rites. The participants apparently look on it as part of the regular pūjā, and it is performed in a festive spirit. It appears to be in origin a fertility ritual.

The Padmāpurāṇa is recited part by part throughout the whole month of Śrāvaṇa, and the book or manuscript, popularly called punthi, is finished on the first day of Bhādra, when the story of the reunion of Lakhindar and Behulā and the votive humns of Manasā are recited. On the same day the Malos refrain from fishing and recite the Padmāpurāṇa very enthusiastically with the accompaniment of long drums (dhol) and cymbals.<sup>2</sup>

### C. Bihar:

Manasā is worshipped in Bihar,<sup>3</sup> where her cult is most popular among the people of the north.<sup>4</sup> In almost every northern village of this province throughout the month of Śrāvaṇa, the people gather together in a place of

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1. Our description is based on a Bengali novel, Advaita Mallabharman's Titās Ekti Nadir Nām. The writer was a local man of the same caste and his description can be accepted as reliable. op.cit., p. 269.
  2. Ibid., p. 276.
  3. V.S.Verma, Socio-Religious, Economic and Literary condition of Bihar, p. 126, footnote.
  4. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., p. 204.

their choice at night and a few of them narrate the story of Lakhindar and Behula with singing and dancing. In the same month the lower class people such as the Kewats of Manbhum, Hazaribagh and Gaya districts roam from door to door singing the pathetic story of Lakhindar and Behulā.<sup>1</sup>

The antiquity of the goddess in this region may be traced back to the early period of the evolution of the cult, when Bengal and Bihar formed a cultural unit. From a careful study of a Sanskrit manuscript entitled Vyādi Bhakti Tarāṅgiṇī, a treatise on Manasā worship found in Mymensingh, it is stated by G.C.Basu that it was written by the famous poet Vidyapati of Mithilā. Though the story of this text differs in a few points, in broad outline it corresponds to that current in Bengal.<sup>2</sup> Basu writes: "It may be that the popular story current here ([Bengal]) was adopted by the people of Mithila ... and a local tradition was formed or the same story was prevalent in Mithila from older days. Whatever might have been the case it seems probable that the writer worked upon what he got in his own locality".<sup>3</sup> The

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1. Ibid.

2. New Indian Antiquary, Vol.III, Nos. 3 & 4, 1944, pp.49-57.

3. Ibid., p. 57.

identification of this Vidyāpati as the famous vernacular poet of Mithilā is supported by S. Sen.<sup>1</sup>

Manasā is also widely worshipped on the plateau of Chota Nagpur division. At the festival of Rahan Parab<sup>2</sup> held on the 13th day of Jyāishṭha, Manasā is worshipped in the form of a twig of siṃ tree. Before any offering is made to the goddess, a member of the family has to go out with two and a half handfuls of grain and sow them in a field in their possession. The sacrificial offerings include ducks, goats and pigeons. The priestly function is performed by one of the members of the family. This form of worship is strictly observed by the lower class people such as the Kurmi-Mahatos, Bauris, Bagdis and Haris. Sometimes even the Brahmans also offer the above mentioned animals which are regularly sacrificed before the goddess by the people of those lower classes in order to achieve merit and prosperity. Manasā is again worshipped on the last day of Śrāvaṇa, in a manner similar to that described above, but without sowing grain.<sup>3</sup>

The Hos of Kolhan in the district of Singhbhum had their own priests who used to protect their people from snake bite and similar accidents by amulets and charms,

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1. Bipradāś, op.cit., Intro.pp.xxviii. ff.
  2. V.R.S'. Monographs, No.5, 1934, pp. 18-19; Cf. B.D.G. (Manbhum), p.94.
  2. What this festival is has not been mentioned.

but the failure of these in some cases led the people to adopt a new method of safeguarding themselves. Before the Hos adopted the regular worship of Manasā a number of their young men learnt the hymns and prayers of the goddess, mostly from the Oriya ojhās. They believe that these hymns and prayers are of great use as a protection against snake-bite and to remove the poison from the body of one bitten. Since the thirties of this century many centres for teaching the secrets of the cult of Manasā grew up in Kolhan. We have a description of the methods used by an ojha to teach his disciples in the village of Dumbisai. Two days before the new moon an enclosure is made under a big tamarind tree in the ojhā's courtyard where he alone sits in meditation. His disciples are instructed to sit on all sides of the enclosure with folded hands and to hear him when he utters the hymns and prayers, which in fact consist merely of the names of Hindu gods and goddesses and descriptions of the methods of their worship. The disciples also recite the hymns and prayers in chorus and this practice is continued for three to four hours, after which the ojha falls on the ground before the small mound of earth representing the goddess herself. Then the disciples start shaking their heads, foaming at the mouths and knocking their heads against a wicker fence. Canes

which are kept within the enclosure are taken by three or four disciples, and they began to strike each other. One who is beaten by his fellows and cannot beat the others is taken to be unfit to achieve success. After being tested in the above way the successful candidates are allowed to tie a black string round each of their arms on the day of the new moon, and henceforth they are believed to be immune from snake bite.<sup>1</sup>

Among the many Hindu deities which are known and worshipped by the Bhumijas of South Manbhum, Manasā is one. "... when asked to describe the forms of the above deities most of the informants gave confused pictures. None of them could give a satisfactory explanation as to why an image is made and subsequently immersed in water. These indicate that idolatry as a national tradition has not yet gone deep into their mind. Regarding the qualities and functions of the deities represented by idols, the conception of the average Bhumij does not conform to the Hindu theological concepts very much. These deities are regarded merely as powerful spirits whose aid is to be invoked for personal benefit either

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1. D.N.Majumdar, A Tribe in Transition, pp. 139-140.



to avert diseases or other mishaps, or for the acquisition of wealth."<sup>1</sup>

The Oraons of Ranchi also worship the goddess very enthusiastically. Among them there is a special class of Mātis (tribal doctors) known as Nāg-mātis or Snake Doctors. Each Nāg-Māti with his disciples offers fowls to the goddess three times a year - on any day of the months of Jyāishṭha, Āshāḍa and Śrāvaṇa. They all fast the whole day, and in the evening one fowl is sacrificed on behalf of the Nāg-māti and each of his disciples. Songs about the goddess are recited in chorus, followed by clapping.<sup>2</sup>

Thus the cult of Manasā in the Chota Nagpur plateau is not only confined to the Hindus and semi-Hinduised aboriginals but has also spread among the non-Hindu tribes.

Again, the Hos and the Bhumijas of Seraikella<sup>3</sup> have not escaped the influence of Hinduism in general and of the cult of Manasā in particular, which they accepted in the first quarter of the present century. In the village of

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1. Man in India, vol.33, No.2, p.151.
  2. S.C.Roy, Oran Religion and Customs, pp. 302-303.
  3. Seraikella is a state which was neither historically nor geographically nor linguistically or culturally linked up with the Chota Nagpur plateau down to the modern period. The chief and the people are "distinctly Oriya in their character, origin and authorship" (T.N.N. Singh Deo, Singhbhum, Seraikella and Kharswan Through the Ages, pp. 76-77).

Nohadi near the town of Seraikella, the Purti Kilis<sup>1</sup> raised an altar in honour of Manasā. The people of this group offer sweets and flowers and sacrifice fowls and goats before the altar.<sup>2</sup> The Bhumijas worship Manasā on two or three days of Śrāvaṇa in the courtyard of each family. "A small earthen pot with raised brim is placed in the courtyard already plastered with cowdung solution. The ghaṭ (pot), as it is called, is filled up with water and a mango twig with three, five or seven leaves, is placed on it; upon this is put a piece of white cloth without any border, about two cubits long. The whole thing is then placed on some paddy grains.

"Flowers, bel leaves and sweetmeats are offered as in all other rites. Milk and gāñjā (the tops of hemp) form special offerings to this deity. In addition to these, one each of the following animals and birds, namely goats and ducks, pigeons and cocks, are sacrificed. The sacrificial animal must always belong to the male sex, and each of them is beheaded by the priest with one stroke of the tāngi (battle axe). The animal and birds together with the other offerings, are consumed by the devotees after

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1. The Hos are divided into a number of exogamous groups called Kilis. Purti Kili is one of them.
  2. Anthropological Papers, Calcutta University, New Series, No.1, 1927, p.59.

the completion of the rite".<sup>1</sup> It is to be noted that all the sacrifices are conducted by the nāyā, the communal priest, who is a member of their own tribe.<sup>2</sup>

Thus it is clear that, besides the recent adoption of the cult by various tribes, the cult of Manasā has spread in Bihar over quite a long time, especially among the aboriginals and the semi-Hinduised people who worship the goddess more enthusiastically than the orthodox Hindus and sing songs in her honour with great enthusiasm.

#### D. Assam:

##### Introduction -

The cult of Manasā is still popular in Assam, especially in the districts of Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang.<sup>3</sup> Reference to her worship occurs in the works of 16th century poets. Like those of Bengal, the early poets of Assam composed songs telling the pathetic story of Behula and Lakhindar and the power of Manasā. Two of the early poets of whom we know something were Manakar and Durgabar.<sup>4</sup> It is suggested that it was during the Muslim invasion of Kamrup in the 13th century A.D., that the cult of Manasā along with other popular cults spread into Assam from Bengal.<sup>5</sup>

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1. Anthropological Papers, Calcutta University, New Series, No.2., 1931, pp. 41-42.
  2. Ibid., p.36.
  3. B.K.Barua, A Cultural History of Assam, Vol.1, p.195; Manasā-Kāvya, Intro. p.9 & Preface p.5; L.No.1(Assam).
  4. Supra, Chapter III, pp. 191-201.
  5. Manasā-Kāvya, Intro., p.9

This hypothesis, however, has not been supported by any textual or historical evidence. Furthermore political and cultural contacts between Bengal and Assam before the Muslim invasion were not lacking. Thus it seems unlikely that the cult spread into Assam during the Muslim invasion.<sup>1</sup>

It is traditionally believed by the people of Mangaldai that the ancestors of the people of the Mariyā or Mariya caste were the founders of the cult of Manasā in Kamrup.<sup>2</sup> This tradition is supported by the literature written in honour of Manasā,<sup>3</sup> for the Jāgarana Gīta of Manakara contains the words: "Let all the devotees accompanied by the people of the Mariyā caste be conscious".<sup>4</sup> The special mention of this caste confirms the tradition.

Periods, Methods and Places of worship - In the version of Manakara occurs the following: "Vishaharī is worshipped wholeheartedly (by the people) in the form of an earthen pot, containing a twig of siju (sij) by offering lotuses in the rainy season".<sup>5</sup> The same poet shows that

1. While tracing the origin of the Assamese language B.K.Barua who is one of the advocates of the theory of the spread of the cult of Manasā into Assam during the Muslim invasion, writes that besides the songs of Buddha Gān O Dohā compiled between 8th to 10th century A.D., "other literary productions of the period were the unwritten songs and ballads. The popular songs were those connected with the episode of Behulā, Lakhindar and the worship of Manasā..." (B.K.Barua, A Cultural History of Assam, p.141).
2. Manasa-Kavya, Intro. pp.9f; Mariyā or Mariya is a small caste dealing in brass, bell-metal, iron, etc.
3. Ibid.,
4. Manasa-Kavya, p.3; For the interpretation of the words Maraiyā and Marali in the text see Ibid., Section-Meaning of the words 'jh'.
5. Ibid., p.11.

her place of worship was in a mandapa (pavilion):

"She is worshipped day and night in the pavilion, throughout the four rainy months".<sup>1</sup> According to Durgabar: "She is worshipped on four days in the month of Śrāvaṇa, the two last days (Samkrānti) and the fifth tithi of each fortnight (Pañchamī)."<sup>2</sup> Almost the same customs are maintained by the people of Assam even today.

Manasā is now worshipped during the rainy months - Jyāishṭha, Āshāḍha, Śrāvaṇa and Bhādra.<sup>3</sup> In western Assam she is chiefly worshipped on the Nāgapañchamī.<sup>4</sup>

Manasā is worshipped in the form of an earthen image, an earthen pot, or a pyramid made of banana bark.<sup>5</sup> As in Bengal the worship of Manasā represented by the pot is earlier than the other forms of worship, as is evident from the 16th century Assamese text. The worship of Manasā in the form of an image seems to have originated in recent centuries, as there is no reference to such worship in our Assamese texts.

Manasā is worshipped in a selected sacred spot known as thān, usually under a tree. A twig of sij is

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p.96.

3. Barua, A Cultural History of Assam, p.195.

4. L.No.1 (Assam)

5. L.No.1 (Assam); For the reference to idol worship see Calcutta Review, Vol.XXI, 1853, p.413.

planted there on this occasion. All the villagers in Western Assam worship the goddess, with the exception of staunch Vaishnavas.<sup>1</sup> In some places of Bengal, at the bāroyārī pūjā Manasā is worshipped in a temporary pavilion in the village square. The same practice is also current in Western Assam, where the worship is conducted either village-wise or faction (Khel)-wise. People of other religions also participate in this worship. Vaishnavas who usually refrain from worshipping the goddess also pay their homage directly or indirectly during the outbreak of epidemic diseases.<sup>2</sup>

Purpose of worship, priestly functions and sacrificial offerings -

Though primarily the goddess of snakes, Manasā is also worshipped in other contexts, as in Bengal. In an early Assamese text it is said that Manasā gives the boons of children to the childless, of a wife to a bachelor, and of wealth and prosperity to the needy.<sup>3</sup> One who worships her is blessed with all kinds of boons - through her the blind man sees, the prisoner becomes free and the childless man/woman gets a child; by worshipping her one

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1. L.No.1 (Assam).
  2. J.University of Gauhati, XI.No.2, Science, 1960 p.56.
  3. Manasā-Kavya, p.10.

can avert calamities and become wealthy.<sup>1</sup> For similar reasons she is worshipped even today.

In Assam Manasā is worshipped by the name Mārai<sup>2</sup> as the presiding deity of epidemic diseases.<sup>3</sup> Like the worship of Manasā the Mārai pūjā is also widely current in the districts of Goalpara, Kamrup, Darrang and Nowgong.<sup>4</sup> It is popularly believed that if a childless man or a poor one worships the goddess, he will be blessed with children or wealth respectively, and that, if she is not propitiated, epidemic, misfortune and calamity are increased.<sup>5</sup>

The priestly function is usually performed by a Brahman, but the Kacharis they have their own priest, known as Deori. It is interesting to note that the Kacharis do not allow their children to look at the image of Manasā, as she is believed to be a malevolent power.<sup>6</sup> Besides the usual offerings given to the deities in general Manasā is offered buffaloes, goats, ducks and pigeons.<sup>7</sup>

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1. Manasā-Kāvya, p.96.
  2. Two plausible explanations of the origin of the name Mārai has been given. Firstly, the goddess or the name may have migrated from South India where Mārāmbā or Mariammā is worshipped as the goddess of cholera, small-pox and other infectious diseases. Secondly, it might be a loanword from the Baros who call nāga-pūjā as Mārai pūjā (Manasā-Kāvya, Intro.p.11). In our opinion the word had its origin from Māri or Mārī, meaning epidemic as stated elsewhere (Supra, pp.425). For etymology see also J.University of Gauhati, op.cit.,pp.38,59. 4. J.University of Gauhati, op.cit.,p.55.
  3. Manasā-Kāvya, Intro.p.11 & Preface, p.5; B.K.Barua, Studies in Early Assamese Literature, p.87; J.University of Gauhati, op.cit.,56. 4. J.University of Gauhati, op.cit.,p.56.
  5. Manasā-Kāvya, Intro.p.11.
  6. L.No.1 (Assam).
  7. Manasā-Kāvya, Intro.p.11 & Preface, p.5.

Buffaloes are usually sacrificed at the time of bāroyārī pūjā.<sup>1</sup>

### Festivals -

The most remarkable features of Manasā worship in Assam are the Ojhā Pālī and the Deodhanī or Deodha dance. The Ojhā Pālī is an indigenous choric dance which "was current in the land even before the Vaisnavite renaissance initiated by Sankardev in the fifteenth century. The Ojha or Master recites verses from the scriptures to the accompaniment of gestures and the Palis or Assistants keep the melody with cymbals and steps while the Daina Pali or chief Assistant explains the verses in a dialogue with the Master. The Daina Pali is a master of the folk idiom, for he keeps the audience enraptured with his witty sayings and homely parables. It is however possible to find traces of the Indian classical tradition in the music as well as the gestures of the Ojha Pali, though the institution is wholly popular and rural as it is seen today. The Ojha Pali probably had the myths associated with the snake goddess Manasa as its staple before the advent of the Vaisnavite reformation. It is still popular among the Assamese Hindus as well as Kachari tribals in the districts of Goalpara, Kamrup and Darrang."<sup>2</sup> The songs of

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1. L.No.1 (Assam).

2. Folk-lore, Vol.1, No.3, pp.148-149; Cf., P. Banerjee, The Folk Dance of India, p.74.



Manasā are still sung at the Ojhā Pāli when Manasā is worshipped as Mārai.<sup>1</sup>

The Deodhanī or Deodha dance is more rustic than the Ojhā Pāli. When performed by women it is known as Deodhanī, and when by men as Deodha.<sup>2</sup> Both are performed on the occasion of Manasā worship.<sup>3</sup> This dance had its birth from two places of Assam, Mangaldai and Uttaralakhimpur.<sup>4</sup> It is popularly believed that the participants are the choosen people of the goddess, who commands them through dreams to dance on the occasion of her worship. They belong to the lower classes.<sup>5</sup> Songs of Manasā are recited during this dance festival.<sup>6</sup>

Among the participants a few are believed to be inspired by the goddess and thus to be able to foretell the future.<sup>7</sup> Similar beliefs are current in Bengal,<sup>8</sup> and have been attested in South Indian serpent worship. In the South Kannara district there is a famous serpent temple on one of the highest mountains of the Western Ghāts, named

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1. B.K.Barua, Assamese Literature, p.90.
  2. For etymology of the terms Deodhani or Deodha see J.University of Gauhati, op.cit.,p.38,60.
  3. P.Banerjee, op.cit.,p.76; Calcutta Review, vol.XXI, p.413; Manasā-Kāvya, Intro.pp.11-12; L.No.1 (Assam); J.University of Gauhati, op.cit., pp.37-58.
  4. P. Banerjee, op.cit., p.76.
  5. J.University of Gauhati, op.cit., p.52.
  6. P.Banerjee, op.cit., p.76; J.University of Gauhati, op.cit., p.56.
  7. Manasā-Kāvya, op.cit., Intro.p.12.
  8. Supra, pp.395, 431f; S.P.P., Vol.XXXVII, No.4, B.S.1337, pp.187ff. It is wrongly said that the practice of prediction at the time of Manasā worship is not known in Bengal (Manasā-Kāvya, Intro.p.11).

Subrahmanya. On the day of the annual festival at this place "a person supposed to be possessed by the spirit of Subrahmanya, dances at the temple, and is believed to have the power of foretelling the future".<sup>1</sup>

It is suggested that as the Deodhani dance is performed only at the time of Mārai pūjā, there is no direct connection with Manasā and that both the Ojhā Pāli and the Deodhani dance are unconnected with the original Manasā worship.<sup>2</sup> However the Deodhani dance is performed not only at the time of Mārai pūjā, but also at the time of Manasā worship.<sup>3</sup> Again, the practice of foretelling the future as a part of the Deodhani dance is an ancient custom which is associated with pestilence and disease and observed by aborigines.<sup>4</sup> It seems to us that, though now often connected with other cults, the custom of soothsaying was originally connected with snake worship, as is evident from South India. Manasā had her origin outside the domain of Brahmanical Hinduism, so this practice may have crept into her worship at an early stage of her evolution, and later, when the goddess acquired a social status in society, this early custom of prediction was condemned. But it has penetrated so deeply into the minds of the people of Bengal

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1. Vogel, op.cit., pp.272-273.

2. Manasa-Kavya, Intro., p.12.

3. J.University of Gauhati, op.cit., pp.37,38,48,56; L.No.1 (Assam)

4. Manasa-Kavya, Intro. pp.11f.

and Assam that even the upper class people give it some importance even today.

Before we conclude we must say something about the Manasā worship at Kamakhya. Kamakhya is a chief centre of devī worship in general and Manasā worship in particular.<sup>1</sup> Manasā is worshipped here on the last day of Śrāvaṇa in the form of an earthen pot which is ritually placed at night in the temple adjoining the sacred temple of the Mother Goddess Kāmākhyā.<sup>2</sup> The worship continues till the second day of Bhādra.<sup>3</sup> Around the altar are placed many clay images of snakes, which are given by individuals who have made manat beforehand for some reason or other. The priestly function is performed by a Brahman priest.<sup>4</sup> Songs of Manasā are recited from the texts of Durgabara and Manakara. "The manuscript is opened for worship on the shukla-dvadashi day of the month of Chaitra (March-April) and it is finally closed on the last day of Bhadra (August-September). There is a strict tabu on this manuscript being opened or touched in the intervening period."<sup>5</sup>

In Kamakhya the Deodha or Deodhanī dance "is a necessary accompaniment and unavoidable auxiliary to the worship

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1. Ibid., Intro., p.11; J.University of Gauhati, op.cit., p.55; L.No.1. (Assam).
  2. J.University of Gauhati, op.cit., p.48.
  3. J.University of Gauhati, op.cit., p.54.
  4. Ibid., p.55.
  5. Ibid., p.38, Cf. p.54.

of the snake deity Manasā<sup>1</sup>. The dance is followed by the recitations from the episode of Behulā and Lakhindar.<sup>2</sup> The participants in the dance are required to live on vegetarian diet throughout the month of Śrāvana and they observe certain other rites.<sup>3</sup> They dance very vigorously, shrieking, howling and jumping.<sup>4</sup> It is further observed: "Some miraculous physical feats, too, are exhibited. A razor-sharp blade of a very heavy and long sacrificial knife is licked with the tip of the tongue. Some of them dance with its cutting edge placed on the nape. Still others dance on a long sacrificial knife held horizontally by other dancers. This performance is shown by experienced deodhas only."<sup>5</sup> Another kind of dance with a sword is performed. "The performers sanctify the swords on which they dance by placing it (sic) before Manasā prior to the actual performance. Besides, they salute the sword before and after dancing on it. The same sword is re-sanctified by its ceremonial placing before the goddess by the second performer. It is believed that Manasā inspires them to perform this miraculous dance. Neither herbal medicine nor chemicals are used to treat the cutting edge of the sword. Likewise the feet of the dancers, too, are not to have any

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1. Ibid., p.37.

2. Ibid., p.56.

3. Ibid., pp. 42ff.

4. Ibid., p.49.

5. J.University of Gauhati, op.cit., p.53.

treatment."<sup>1</sup> Similar practices are observed in Pacharia, Gerua and Sualkuchi at a distance of 16, 18 and 15 miles respectively to the north-west of Gauhati. The dance festival continues 5 days in Pacharia and 3 days in two other places. It is of recent origin at these places and is believed to be "an offshoot of the original institution at Kamakhya."<sup>2</sup>

The popularity of the goddess in Kamakhya is shown from the fact that a few priestly families, who had given up worshipping the goddess, returned to her after snake bite or the appearance of snake inside their houses. Every family of Kamakhya-dham worships Manasā in some form or other. The minimum is the worship of a volume containing an Assamese Manasakāvya.<sup>3</sup>

Thus the cult of Manasā has been popular in Assam, especially in Kamrup, from an early period, and it enjoys no less popularity even today.

E.Orissa. In this connection it is to be noted that in Orissa snakes are worshipped on certain days of the year, especially on the Nāgā-chaturthī or Nāga-chauthī, which falls on the fourth day of the bright half of Kārtika.<sup>4</sup> S.N.Roy categorically points out that the worship of Manasā does

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1. Ibid.

2. Ibid., p.38.

3. J.University of Gauhati, op.cit., p.55.

4. J.B.O.R.S., Vol.XII, 1926; K.Das, A Study of Orissan Folk-Lore, p.47; O.H.R.J., Vol.III, No.1, 1954, p.5.

not prevail in Orissa,<sup>1</sup> but N.R.Ray<sup>2</sup> and A.Bhattacharya<sup>3</sup> refer to its existence in this state. No detailed information is given by them. The latter scholar adds that the worship of Manasā along with her five or seven sisters is current among the aboriginals of Orissa.<sup>4</sup> This appears to be a feature indigenous to this region. N.N.Vasu records the worship of an image (Plate - 9.)<sup>5</sup> as Manasā by the people of Tundara in the Balasor district. The practice of Manasā worship seems to be unknown in Orissa, as far as our own researches go. The omission of reference to it in the works of native scholars clearly suggests that the cult is not very prevalent there.<sup>6</sup> Thus K.Das, the eminent folklorist of Orissa, makes no mention of the existence of the goddess in his monumental work "A Study of Orissan Folk-Lore."<sup>7</sup> On the other hand he mentions the worship of a snake goddess named Jāgulei.

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1. J.B.O.R.S., Vol.XII,p.428.
  2. N.R.Ray,op.cit.,p.588.
  3. Folklore, Vol.II,No.3,p.172.
  4. Ibid.
  5. Supra, pp. 337. ; N.N.Vasu,The Archaeological Survey of Mayurabhanja, Vol.1,Intro.,p.XXXCIII.
  6. K.Das,op.cit.,O.H.R.J.,Vol.III,No.1,pp.1-5.
  7. K.Das,op.cit.,p.104; It is observed that the Jāgulei panchami is performed on the fifth day of the bright fortnight of Śrāvana. "The barber of the village builds a three-eyed mud image of the Goddess Jāgulei,decorated with hoods of snakes on the head, places Her in a basket and with a torch in hand moves from door to door. She is offered cakes specially prepared for this occasion. This festival is a precautionary measure against snake biting." (K.Das, op.cit.,p.104).

This Jāgulei seems to be the snake goddess Jāngulī of the Buddhists, who enjoyed wider popularity in the age of Buddhist predominance. But probably Manasā is worshipped, however infrequently, in the boundary areas where Orissa adjoins Bengal and Bihar. Thus the cult of Manasā, if known at all, is very insignificant in this province.

## Part II.

### A. Manasā Vrata.

Womenfolk occasionally perform the 'Manasā Vrata' or the ceremonial worship of Manasā. It is thus defined by Dr.S.R.Das: "Vrata, popularly called Varta in some parts of Bengal, is a vowed observance, a religious act of devotion and austerity. The term is also used in the sense of any rite practised or observed. To the ordinary mind, Vrata generally means the performance of rites or observances for the fulfilment of specific desires."<sup>1</sup> He adds :  
 " ... Of the numerous folk religious rites and rituals the Vratas persist side by side with the so-called Hindu religious rites and rituals are basically non-Aryan and primitive".<sup>2</sup>  
 The Vratas in general can be traced back to early times.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Man in India, vol.32, No.4, p.212.
  2. Ibid., pp. 211-212.
  3. Ibid., pp.219-223; A.N.Tagore, Bāṅglār Vrata, pp.1-17; N.R.Ray op.cit., pp.581-584 & footnote.

Many Vratas are non-Aryan in origin and have been absorbed<sup>1</sup> into and assimilated with Hinduism.

When a Vrata rite is observed, a story which glorifies the goddess for whom it is observed is narrated in simple prose, usually by an elderly woman of the family but sometimes by a woman story teller. The latter tells the story in a good number of neighbouring families when requested. This practice is now obsolete, owing to the advance of urban culture. The story, as generally told by such women at the occasion of Manasā worship, is as follows.<sup>2</sup>

Once upon a time there was a merchant who had seven daughters-in-law. Regular presents were sent by the parental houses of these daughters-in-law with the exception of the youngest one. For this the youngest daughter-in-law was unpopular with her mother-in-law.

On a rainy day, while all the seven daughters-in-law were gossiping, they expressed their desire for certain dishes to one another. The youngest one, who was then pregnant, wanted to take boiled rice steeped in cold water with a sour preparation of fish.

Then at nightfall they went to bathe in a pond. On the bank of this pond there was a forest where eight snakes lived. While bathing the youngest caught some fish and

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1. Tagore, *op.cit.*, pp.1-17; *Man in India*, Vol.32, No.4, pp.219-223.
  2. A.Majumdar, *Meyeder Vrata Kathā*, pp.139-142; Cf. *JBORS.*, Vol.XII, pp.430-432; B.A.Gupte, *Hindu Holidays & Ceremonials*, pp.142-144; A. Bhattacharya, *B.M.K.I.*, pp.218-220; *Folklore*, Vol.II, No.3, pp.172ff.



carried them with her to the house where she kept them alive overnight in a vessel of water. The other daughters-in-law joked with her about the fulfilment of her desire. However the fish were really the eight snakes who resided in the forest and who had changed themselves into fish when the forest caught fire.

Next morning the youngest girl saw snakes in the vessel when she opened it in order to kill them and cut them up for cooking. She was very astonished and henceforth she cared for them, feeding them with milk and plantain. The snakes began to grow under her fostering care. They were so pleased with her that they decided to reward her. With this in mind they went to heaven to see their mother Manasā who was anxious for her children. They told her of the services rendered by the youngest daughter-in-law and her distressed position in the family. They requested her to bring the youngest girl up to heaven. Manasā disagreed, as she fully knew the nature of her children.

At last she was convinced and, dressing herself as a married woman, she mounted her chariot and came to the house of the merchant. When the merchant's wife asked her identity, Manasā told her that she was the maternal aunt of the youngest daughter-in-law. She expressed her desire to take the girl away for some days. The mother-in-law agreed.

Before the girl was taken into the chariot, she was instructed by Manasā to close her eyes until she was asked to open them. When she opened her eyes to her great amazement she found herself in a palatial building.

Manasā instructed her to collect requisites of worship for her every day, to boil milk for her eight snake brothers and not to look to the north.

Days passed. One day the girl looked to the north and she saw Manasā dancing. She was so carried away by the dance that she forgot her duty. When the dance stopped, she hurriedly boiled the milk. The milk was drunk by the eight snakes, whose mouths were scorched, as it was usually allowed to cool for some time before drinking. They were very angry with the girl for her neglect, and determined to bite her.

Manasā came to know this and prevented them. She told them: "Let me return her to her father-in-law's house, where you may bite her". The girl was instructed to wear ornaments on one half of her body and then she was taken back by Manasā to her father-in-law's house. Before Manasā left her, she said: "Look, your brothers are angry with you and they want to bite you; but if you praise them to your father-in-law and mother-in-law, they will give up their idea of biting you."

When the girl was seen to be wearing ornaments on only

one half of her body, all the family members were surprised and some of them mocked her. Then she replied: "Long live my brothers Āṛona, Pāṛona, Dhonṛā, Boṛā, Pune, Āṛul, Pārul, Keute and others! Am I worried for ornaments? This time I have come wearing ornaments on one half of my body, next time I will come fully adorned".

When the eight snakes, who were crawling about the house compound intending to bite the girl, hear her praising them, their anger was thoroughly pacified and they returned to their mother. They requested Manasā to take the girl once more and to embellish the other half of her body in order to maintain their prestige on earth.

Again Manasā came down to earth and brought ornaments for the girl to wear on the other half of her body. Then Manasā said: "I am not your aunt; I am Manasā; I live on the Phani Manasā (sij) tree; you will propagate my worship on the earth. You will worship me in the form of this tree on the Daśaharā and on the Nāgapañchamī and you will offer me boiled rice steeped in cold water after proper sanctification on the Arandhana day observed in Bhadra". After this speech she disappeared. The youngest daughter-in-law told the story to everybody. All of them began to love her. Other members of the family began to worship Manasā and the neighbours also started worshipping

Manasā when they heard the story. Thus finally her worship spread far and wide.

It is reported that this legend is current in both west and east Bengal "with its narrative unity almost maintained intact".<sup>1</sup> However, we have not been informed of its popularity by our correspondents in west Bengal. We are informed that during the time of a Vrata rite, the story of Behulā, Lakhindar and Chāndo is recited. It seems to us that the above story has been overshadowed by the more popular story of Behulā, Lakhindar and Chāndo. In the same way the popular rites and rituals are becoming more and more obsolete at the present time.

The observation of the Manasā Vrata generally falls on the days of Manasā worship. In a few places of the districts of Burdwan and Malda this rite, which is known as "Behulā Amābasyā", is observed on the Amābasyā (new moon) of Śrāvaṇa, of Bhādra, of Āśvina and of Kārtika. In this connection the women observe Vrata and the Vrata story is recited. During the time of Vrata a peculiar printed picture (Plate - 28.) is hung on the wall or elsewhere.

It is reported that in the present day the Brahmans occupy "a distinguished place in the Vrata celebrations. They command the women-folk in order to get the Dakshina or

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1. A.Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp.216-218; Folklore, Vol.II, No.3, pp.173ff.

presentations. Now our women-folk find it very difficult to perform the Vrata without Brahmins who are their religious guide".<sup>1</sup> Thus the priestly function at this rite, which seems to have been performed only by the women themselves for centuries together, is now more and more performed by the Brahman priests. How the Vrata rite of Manasā has been Hinduised, is known from its observance in the Tangail subdivision, Mymensingh and in the Manikganj subdivision, Dacca.<sup>2</sup> It is as follows.

In each Vaishnava family an earthen pot is installed on the last day of Āshāḍha by a Brahman priest and the goddess is worshipped on the same day with daśopachāra i.e., ten prescribed Śāstric requisites. Thenceforward the goddess is worshipped daily in the form of this pot with offerings of flowers and bel leaves instead of the daśopachāra till the last day of Śrāvaṇa, when the priest observes a Vrata and the goddess is worshipped along with the ashtanāgas (possibly by adding another engraved pot having a cover on the mouth). On the outer surface of this pot are painted figures of three snakes and on the covering the figures of five snakes are engraved, numbering altogether eight. No one except the Brahman priests are

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1. Indian Folklore, Vol.2, No.2, 195; p.111.

2. S.P.P., Vol.IX, 2nd issue, 1309 B.S., p.109.

allowed to perform the priestly function at this rite. On the other hand in most of the Śākta families earthen images are made and worshipped with Shoraśopachāra i.e., sixteen prescribed śāstric requisites.

At the end of this kind of worship the women-folk hear the Vratakathā, or the story which glorifies the goddess for whom it is observed. The eating of cooked rice is forbidden on the day of Vrata, i.e., on the last day of Śrāvana. After the rite the engraved pot is immersed in the water on the first day of Bhādra. This immersion ceremony is followed by a boat race.<sup>1</sup> The difference between the Manasā Vrata and her usual worship is the recitation of the story in the observance of the former rite.

Thus the Manasā Vrata is a great festive occasion among women, especially among Bengali mothers, who pray

1. For details of boat race see pp. 489-492.
2. It is noted by W. Ward that Bengali mothers observe other rites to propitiate Manasā. He writes: "...Bengali mothers, anxious for the preservation of their children from the bite of serpents, implore the favour of Manasā. On one of the last days of Shrābana, women may be seen coming out of a village, with vessels in their hands, containing a composition of rice, milk and sugar. Proceeding out of the village, they take their station generally near a tank, and offer their homely present to the goddess on behalf of their children. The presentation being done, they help themselves to the rice, milk and treacle; and after thanking the goddess, of whom, however, no image is set up, they return home with the sure hope of seeing their children preserved, during the ensuing season, from the bite of venomous snakes. In towns and large villages where women cannot go out, this ceremony, termed Ban-bhojan (1), takes place in the house. "In spite, however, of the caution and piety of Hindu mothers, their children are sometimes bitten by snakes. In all such

continued overleaf...

to the goddess for the prevention of snake-bite in particular and for the welfare of the family in general. "The Vrata-rites, truly speaking, are the living records of the socio-religious rites and rituals of the people whom the so-called Aryans absorbed and integrated. Non-Aryan cultural traits have been still preserved in the rites and practices, in the ritual songs, ritual paintings and ritual tales which in spite of centuries of brahmanical acculturation still survive in rural areas. And it can be said that the Vrata-rites of Bengal have not yet been wholly built into the 'temple of Hinduism' and contain much of the Vratya cult of pre-Vedic Indians".<sup>1</sup>

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continued from previous page...

cases, the power of Manasā is, by no means questioned; the blame rests either on the children themselves, who are alleged to have been killed for their irreverence to her, or on the mothers, who are supposed not to have properly propitiated the angry goddess (Calcutta Review, Vol.XVIII, July-Dec. pp.57f).

Even some Muslim mothers of east Bengal offer plantain milk, paddy, durba grass, kachu (a sort of arum) leaves and flowers to snakes by deluging them into the water on the last day of Śrāvana to get rid of the snakes (S.P.P. Vol.XXXIX, 3rd issue, 1339 B.S., p.220).

(1) The term Ban-bhojan has been misinterpreted by the author. In Bengal the term stands for picnic which takes place generally in the open space outside the house.

1. Man in India, Vol.32, No.4, p.242.

## B. Festivals

(I) The Jhānpān or Jhāpān ceremony: We have already discussed the gatherings of Ojhās in the Jessore, Khulna, Rajshahi and Rangpur districts. These appear to be variants of the widespread ceremony of Jhānpān, which is a secular ceremony observed at the worship of Manasā. It is the annual meeting of the snake charmers or the ojhās of a particular area, who exhibit numerous tricks with their snakes. Reference to it occurs in the versions of west Bengal poets such as Bipradāsa,<sup>1</sup> Kavikanthana, Mukund-<sup>2</sup>arāma and Ketakādāsa.<sup>3</sup> It is observed on different days of Manasā worship in different localities. We have already seen that one text lays down that it is to be observed on the month of Āshāḍha.<sup>4</sup>

The origin of the word jhānpān or jhāpān is shrouded in mystery. It is suggested by S.C.Adhya that the word originated either from the Bengali jhānpāiā parā (to risk one's life) or jhānpāna (to jump), as the snake charmers who participate in this ceremony play with venomous snakes at the risk of their lives; alternatively the word might be derived from jupār. It is to be noted that at the time of the observance of this ceremony some one is inspired by the

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1. Bipradās, op.cit., pp.96,97.

2. Mukundarāma: Chandimangalkavya, Ed.Sen, Bandopadhyaya and Vasu, p.288.

3. Ketakādās, op.cit., pp.134,159,160,330-331.

4. Supra, p. 384



spirit of the goddess; this possession is generally known as bhar in Bengali, but locally as jupār.<sup>1</sup>

Another possible source of origin may be added to these.

The snake charmers carry their snakes in the small wicker-work boxes known as jhānpis or jhānpīs. Hence the occasion of the exhibition of the snakes may have been called jhānpān.

The exhibition of snakes at the worship of Manasā is current throughout Bengal, though the term jhānpān or jhāpān is peculiar to west Bengal, and there is no name for it in east Bengal.<sup>2</sup> It developed into a distinct form of folk amusement as early as the 15th century A.D., as is evident from Bipradās's version of the Manasā legend. The continuity of this festival through the ages may be proved from the references to it in the versions of later poets such as Mukundarām and Ketakādās.

The French artist F.B.Solvyns, who visited India in the early 19th century A.D., has left an account of this ceremony, illustrated by a coloured drawing (Plate - 29.). To quote: "The Janpaun is the feast of serpents; the lower classes call it also the carpenter's feast, because it is celebrated particularly by carpenters, joiners and those in general who

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1. S.P.P., Vol. XXXVII, No. 4, 1337 B.S., p. 189.

2. Supra, pp. 448-450; 453-454.

work in wood. On the day of the Janpaun all the Hindoos of these trades get their tools blest, and as the feast is in honour of the serpents, every true Hindoo of whatsoever rank, as long as the feast lasts, leaves at his dinner a little rice in his plate, or in the banana leaf which serves him in place of it, and deposits it after his meal behind the house, in hopes to attract the serpents by this regale, and that such a voluntary offering will preserve him during the year from these venomous (sic) reptiles, whose bite is often mortal.

"When the Janpaun or Munsah Poojah is to be celebrated, several Mauls [Māls], ... are hired for the purpose, and one of their children is drest up in the best manner possible; after which they seat him upon bambous and the other Mauls carry him in procession, escorted by an immense concourse of people and many musicians. The Mauls, though in general dirty and slovenly in their persons, are on this occasion remarkably well drest. They have often magnificent shawls which they borrow from their neighbours. To shew that it is the feast of serpents, every member of the procession carries one in his hand; the child whom they escort has them even round his neck, his arms and his body, ...

"This ceremony in reality is not so disgusting as at first sight it may appear, for the serpent in India, deprived

of his venom, and tamed by men who understand this art, is looked upon quite as a domestic animal, on account of its suppleness and mild disposition...

"It is easily conceived, that this feast is founded in the fear which the serpent in its natural state inspires. Perhaps it may also be to perpetuate the glory and the art of those that tame them, that these animals are carried in a sort of triumph".<sup>1</sup>

In the first paragraph the author seems to be misinformed, in the light of present practice. In present day worship there is no trace of this kind of ritual either among the people noticed by Solvyns or among any other castes. However, his account shows that the ceremony was a common occurrence at the time. The part played by the Māls, as noticed by the author, is still performed by them in some parts of Bengal.<sup>2</sup> The snake charmers of other castes and the ojhās in general also play a similar rôle to that of the Māls.<sup>3</sup> The rôle of the ojhās and his disciples in this ceremony may be traced back to the 15th century A.D.<sup>4</sup> This ceremony is really a conference of snake charmers or ojhās, who are mostly from the lower classes such as Māls, Sānpurīās, Kewāts or Kaivarttas or are low class Muslims,

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1. F.B.Solvyns, Les Hindous, Vol.II, pp.81 ff.
  2. Cf. Calcutta Review, Vol.XVII, July-Dec.1852, pp.55ff.
  3. Cf. Risley, Vol.I, p.84 op.cit.,
  4. Bipradas, op.cit., pp.96ff.

especially in east Bengal.

In the Jhānpān ceremony (i) the snake charmers, popularly known as gunins, and their disciples assemble together on the ground where a fair is held and exhibit various tricks with their snakes allowing them to bite their arms. Each gunin or charmer, stands either on a raised stage made for this purpose (Plate - 30. ) or on a seat made of the wheels of bullock-carts placed one upon another, and then exhibits tricks before the crowd. In some places they also coil snakes round their necks, arms and body; (ii) sometimes a preceptor or guru is carried through the streets in a litter made of bamboos borne on the shoulders of his disciples and in the course of the procession he displays his tricks with the snakes. A preceptor also exhibits tricks sitting in a bullock cart which moves through the streets, and (iii) sometimes each preceptor accompanied by his disciples walks the streets with coiled snakes round their bodies and then return to the ground where the fair is held. Thousands of people gather to witness the exploits of the preceptors. The crowd in each case is asked to believe that the snakes with whom the snake charmers play tricks are venomous.

The performance of this ceremony is not a common occurrence at the present day, but it is still regularly carried

out in some places of the districts of Midnapur, Bankura,  
 Birbhum and Burdwan.<sup>1</sup> Its earlier popularity can be gathered  
 from the fact that in certain places, such as Keja, and  
 Narkeldanga in the district of Burdwan, the fair held on  
 the occasion of Manasā worship is known as the Jhānpāner-Melā,  
 though no exhibition of snakes is given. Only the name  
 jhānpān has survived, but not the proper ceremony. With  
 the advancement of urban culture, this ceremony is becoming  
 obsolete, besides many other folk beliefs, practices and  
 amusements. It is not confined only to Bengal, but is also  
 observed in Manbhum, Bihar.<sup>2</sup> No doubt it was observed in  
 many places of Bengal when the people were unsophisticated  
 and not disturbed by the problems of the modern age.

(II) Boat racing ceremony: The immersion of earthen images  
 of Manasā or of pots is followed by a boat race in many  
 districts of East Bengal and Sylhet,<sup>3</sup> when images of Manasā  
 are placed on the prows of racing boats.<sup>4</sup> "Every year  
 during the rainy season when the snakes are most to be feared,  
 songs in honour of the Queen of snakes are sung with great  
 fervour in all parts of the Gangetic plain. Boat-racing is

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1. For the early account of Jhānpān ceremony of Midnapur, see S.P.P., Vol. XXXVII, No. 4, pp. 187-189; For the present day practice Cf. Folklore, Vol. II, No. 1, pp. 46-47.
  2. Folklore, Vol. II, No. 1, p. 46.
  3. Risley, op. cit., Vol. 1, p. 187; Sen, H. B. L. L., p. 255; J. W. Petavel & K. C. Sen, Behula, Intro. p. iv; B. D. G., (Mymensingh), p. 36; S. P. P., Vol. XXXIX, No. 3, 1339 B. S., p. 220; Folklore, Vol. II, No. 1, pp. 42-43.
  4. New I. A., Vol. VII, Nos. 3 & 4, p. 54. (footnote).

a favourite sport of the riverside folk, who constitute a large proportion of the inhabitants of Eastern Bengal. At that season long boats, manned by numerous oarsmen, dart swiftly along the Meghna and the Dhaleswari, their crews singing songs about Manasā Devī, Queen of snakes, and Behula, the men and women on shore joining them in the chorus. Even the people of that country who have become Mahomedans cannot forget their beautiful Hindu legend. They too take part in these Hindu religious festivities, carried away by the general fervour."<sup>1</sup> Not only are the songs of Manasā recited on this day but also songs about the gods and goddesses of Hindu mythology are sung in chorus with great enthusiasm.<sup>2</sup> Since the partition of Bengal the subject matter of the songs has taken on a very Islamic character, which was to be expected, as ninety per cent of the boatmen are Muslims.<sup>3</sup>

While tracing the origin of this ceremony Bhattacharya writes: "It is very difficult to say how this boat race has come to be associated with this immersion ceremony. It may be that these two distinct festivals have by chance coincided together. Or, it is probable that as Chando, ... is in some

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1. Petavel and Sen, op.cit., Intro., p.iv.
  2. Risley, op.cit., Vol.I, p.187; S.P.P., Vol.XXXIX, 3rd issue, p.220.
  3. Folklore, Vol.II, No.I, p.43.

way or other associated with boats inasmuch as he lost fourteen boats full of cargo in the mid-sea, this boat festival has formed part of the Serpent worship".<sup>1</sup> We may suggest another possible source of the origin of boat racing on the occasion of Manasā worship.

It is said in the manuscript of Vyādī-Bhakti Tarāṅgiṇī, an unpublished Sanskrit treatise on Manasā worship to which we have referred already, that after the return of Lakhindar to life the worship of Manasā was arranged on a boat named Gauhārī, and not on land, as is said in all the Bengali versions.<sup>2</sup> This treatise was discovered in Mymensingh, where the boat-race is observed more enthusiastically than in other places. Thus it seems probable that at an early period the goddess was worshipped on a boat, and the present practice of boat-racing is the remnant of an earlier form of worship. This hypothesis can be substantiated by the fact that in East Bengal, besides annual worship, there is a special type of worship of Manasā, mostly confined to the people who live on fishing. Other castes, including the Brahmans also sometimes perform it. This involves the making of a boat which contains numerous images, believed to represent the 30 crores of gods of the Hindu pantheon. But

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1. Ibid., p.42.

2. New I.A., Vol.VII, Nos. 3 & 4, p.54.

the principal worship is centred on the goddess Manasā.<sup>1</sup>  
 We have already seen that among the founders of the cult of Manasā were the ancestors of those castes who originally gained their livelihood from fishing and boating,<sup>2</sup> and thus it is possible that they were responsible for this form of Manasā worship. This early method of worship seems to have been traditionally maintained by the people of the fisherman caste in Eastern Bengal in general and in Sylhet in particular. In West Bengal, the early home of the cult, neither the boat-racing ceremony nor the worship of Manasā by making abboat is current. In view of this it may be inferred that the boat-racing ceremony is the remnant of an early method of Manasā worship practised by fishermen and boatmen. The views put forward by Bhattacharya do not convince us.

(III) Arandhana ceremony: This ceremony is observed throughout Bengal on the occasion of Manasā worship on the last day of Bhādra. Sometimes it is observed on the last day of Āśvina or on other days. It is so called as on this day all cooking is prohibited, and the only cooked food eaten is that which has been prepared on the day before. The

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1. Sankarananda, op.cit., p.88; Cf. S.P.P.R., Vol.VII, 2nd issue, p.76. It is also observed: "...on the thirtieth day (Śrāvana) the Chandāls in Eastern Bengal celebrate the Nāo-Kā-Pujā, literally boat worship, or as it is more generally called, Chandāl Kudnī, the Chandāl's rejoicing. As its name imports, the occasion is a very festive one, in Sylhet being observed as the great holiday of the year (Risley, op.cit., Vol.I, p.187).
  2. Supra, pp. 435-440.



hearth is painted with alpanā of rice-paste and a twig of sij is placed on the hearth. On this occasion the goddess<sup>1</sup> is worshipped mostly in the form of a twig of sij. A local legend current in the village of Poshla, Burdwan, explains the reason for this prohibition of cooking. On the Nāgapañchamī once it was so happened that when a certain housewife was boiling milk for her children, the maidservant enquired whether she had examined the hearth before lighting the fire. Getting a negative answer from the mistress the maidservant extinguished the fire and found a half burnt snake in the hearth. The housewife then fed the snake with milk from her own breast and it recovered consciousness. The name of this snake was Jhañkeśvarī. Since then abstinence from cooking has been observed on the Nāgapañchamī and the worship of Jhañkeśvarī has been current.<sup>2</sup> A different story of the origin of the worship of Jhañkesvarī<sup>3</sup> is also current in this village.

Thus it seems to us that the local legend explaining the reason for prohibition from cooking on the Nāgapañchamī day, a day of Manasā worship, is really an after-thought of the story tellers. No such explanatory story is current in

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1. Cf. List of the Feasts and Holiday, p.5; Underhill, op.cit., p.126; Folklore, Vol.1, No.4, pp.235-236.
  2. Folklore, Vol.1, No.4, p.236.
  3. L.No.16 (Burdwan).

any other places of Bengal. This practice has been in vogue from the simple reason that during the rainy season snakes are often found hidden in beds, dark corners of cottages, and hearths. The frequent presence of these venomous reptiles inside the houses led to the propitiation of the goddess near or within the hearth by prohibiting cooking, as a means of sanctification.

It is further reported that when the Arandhana ceremony is observed on any Tuesday or Saturday in the month of Bhādra, this is known as Ichchhā-Rānnā and Charchari + Pūjā<sup>1</sup> in some places of Hooghly and Howrah respectively.

### C. Folk entertainments and the Manasa legend

The principal legend of Manasā, the story of Chāndo, Behulā and Lakhindar, serves as an object of folk entertainment in various ways - (i) Bhāsan yātrā, (ii) Jāgarana gāṇa, (iii) Rayānī gāṇa, (iv) Putul nāch, (v) Patas and Patuā saṅgīt and (vi) others.

(I) Bhāsan Yātrā - The yātrā is a popular drama based on either religious or secular stories and performed on an open stage, different from the theatre stage of the modern times. "The yātrās of Bengal, as they exist today, are evidently a very old type of popular play. They may possibly have

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1. L.Nos., 12 (Hooghly), 11 (Howrah).

lineally descended from similar dramatic representations and folk-plays current in the earliest period of Hindu History or even in a period before recorded history begins".<sup>1</sup> Yātrā literally means a "procession" or a 'journey', and Bhāsan yātrā "a floating journey". This mainly deals with the story of Behulā's journey on the river with the dead body of her husband. Professional parties, consisting of 12 to 15 persons each, are hired for dramatic performances of this folk-drama on the occasion of Manasa worship and on other occasions in general.

The Bhāsan yātrā is performed in a very crude manner by lower class people, who have neither aesthetic sense nor literary taste. They try to appeal to the hearts of the audience by gross humour and various vulgar gestures. Their performance is accompanied by dance and music, often very farcical. However crude the Bhāsan yātrā might be, it served as a regular entertainment for the village folk down to the first quarter of the 20th century.<sup>2</sup> Its popularity down to this period can be proved from the publication of a good number of books, by different authors

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1. P.Guha Thakurta, The Bengali Drama its origin and development, p.1; for a fuller account of the yatra see N.K.Chattopadhyay, The Yatras or the Popular Dramas of Bengal; Sen, H.B.L.L., pp.724-743; S.K.De, History of Bengali Literature, pp.442-454.
  2. This remark has been made from my personal experience. I witnessed several times the Bhasana yatra known in our locality as Manasa yatra. There was a professional party in my own village Barhat, P.O.Katranka, Dist.Midnapur, who won reputation in the locality.

including a few from Bengali speaking areas of Bihar, containing the script, and stage directions for its performance.<sup>1</sup>

(II) Jāgarana gāṇa - In West Bengal the songs of Manasā are recited by professional parties at the time of her worship. This is known as Jāgarana gāṇa and continues for three to eight days. The performance is arranged by the family which hires a party. The merchant classes of Birbhum often arrange a jāgarana gāṇa on the occasion of marriages.<sup>2</sup> The word jāgarana in Sanskrit means keeping vigil, and it occurs in the more restricted sense in early Bengali literature.<sup>3</sup> A sixteenth century poet Vrindābanā Dāsa writes: "People keep vigil at night, hearing the songs of Maṅgalā Chāṇḍī".<sup>4</sup> Some of the Manasākāvyas of west Bengal are divided into chapters or pālās, and in the version of Ketakadāsa there is a pālā bearing a heading "Jāgarana Pālā" which includes the main part of the story, from the death of the six sons of Chāṇḍo to the end. It seems that the people used to keep vigil during the recitation of the central part of the legend even in the days of

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1. For early reference to the Bhāsan yātrā, see Sen, H.B.L.L., pp.11-12.
  2. Supra, p. 261.
  3. Vrindābanā Dāsa: Chaitanya Bhāgavatā, ed. Sidhanta Sarasvati, pp.69-70, 979; Kṛishna Dāsa Kabirajā: Chaitanya Charitāmrita, Adi, 17th, 198.
  4. Vrindābanā Dāsa, op.cit., pp.69, 979.

Ketakadāsa, who recorded the popular term. Probably it was only later that the term was used to include the whole of the legend as it is today. A jāgarana gāṇa is generally performed in the courtyards of private houses.

(III) Rayānī gāṇa - As in west Bengal, in east Bengal also the songs of Manasā are recited by professional parties.

These recitations are known as rayānī gāṇa. The word rayānī originated from the Sanskrit rajanī (night). Hindus engage these parties mostly during the time of mānat to the goddess.<sup>1</sup> Each party consists of 12 to 15 members recruited from both sexes. The women participate in the vocal music.<sup>2</sup> The rayānī gāṇa is especially popular in the Bakarganj district. It forms the principal feature of a special form of Manasā worship in the districts of Bakarganj, Dacca and Faridpur, called rayānī-pūjā. A crowd assembles in the courtyard of a house and listens very enthusiastically to the narrative of the principal legend. The rayānī-pūjā continues generally for three, five or seven days. The details of rayānī pūjā are described elsewhere.<sup>3</sup>

Both the jāgarana gāṇa which is also known as bhāsana gāṇa<sup>4</sup> and the rayānī gāṇa are the same, differing only in name.

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1. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., Intro., p.11; C.R. Deb, Pallīgīti o Purbba-banga, pp.204,223. For the details of rayānī gāṇa see Indian Folklore, vol.1, No.3, 1958, pp.22-23.
  2. Indian Folklore, Vol.1, No.3, 1958, p.22.
  3. Supra, pp. 443-444.

(IV) Putul nāch or Puppet show - This is still current in many parts of west Bengal. Such performances with puppets have been traced back to very ancient times from China to Egypt.<sup>1</sup>

It is believed that the puppet show was the earliest form of theatrical performance in South India, and it must have supplied the term sūtradhāra in the Sanskrit drama.<sup>2</sup> The term sūtradhāra is quite appropriate to the puppeteer who controls the movements and actions of the puppets with strings (Sk. sūtra) tied to their movable limbs. In Bengal puppets are made to display the themes of the Rāmāyana, and other Vaishṇava legends, and of the story of Manasā. In many places the latter is the most popular theme of the traditional puppet theatre but in some districts the influence of Vaishṇavism has resulted in the growth of Viashṇava performances, rivalling Manasā in popularity.<sup>3</sup>

The putul nāch is generally performed by professional parties and is especially popular in the districts of Midnapur and 24 Parganas. Each party is engaged either by an individual family at the time of the worship of Manasā, or other gods and goddesses, and on other auspicious occasions such as marriage, the sacred thread ceremony or the ceremony

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1. Jan Bussel, The Puppet Theatre, p.13.
  2. H.K.Ranganath, The Karnatak Theatre, p.44.
  3. Indian Folklore, Vol.1, No.3, 1958, p.25.

of the first feeding of an infant. On the occasion of bāroyārī pūjā held in honour of various gods and goddesses, but primarily of Manasā, the performers are engaged by the villagers in general. The religious aspect of the puppet show is of little account nowadays, though of course it had its origin in religion. The popularity of the puppet show is such that "the male and female, child and adult, highbrow and lowbrow, rich and poor all fall for its charms".<sup>1</sup>

(V) Paṭas and paṭuā saṅgīt - The exhibition of paintings on cloth is an ancient practice in India, probably going back at least to the time of Buddha.<sup>2</sup> These paintings are called paṭas or paṭachitra, and the people who exhibit them, to the accompaniment of songs of their own composition, are known as Paṭuās. As in the present day, in ancient India a class of people earned their livelihood by entertaining the village folk with the paṭas. In the literature of classical India, such as Abhijñāna Sakuntalā and Mālavikāgnimitra of Kalidāsa, Harshacharita of Bāṇabhatta, Uttarāmacharita of Bhavabhūti and Mudrārākshasa of Viśakhadatta we find mention of paṭas or paṭachitras.<sup>3</sup>

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1. J. Bussell, op.cit., p.16.

2. Indian Folklore, Vol.1, No.1, 1956, p.60.

3. G.S. Datta, Paṭuā Saṅgīt, Intro. pp.16-18; Indian Folklore, Vol.1, No.1, 1956, p.60 & No.2, p.85.

The present day paintings include the subjects of the stories of Kṛiṣṇa, Rāma, Śrī Chaitanya and Behulā, and of the other legends derived from the Epics and the Purāṇas. One of the most important and fascinating subjects of the paintings of the Paṭuās, especially in the districts of Midnapur, Bankura and Birbhum, is the story of Behulā.<sup>1</sup> When the Paṭuās exhibit the paintings from door to door, they explain them by telling the stories illustrated by each painting. People in general enjoy seeing these pictures and the women, and the old folk sometimes moved ask for a repeat performance, for which they pay extra money or goods. These Paṭuās recite the stories in a very heartfelt manner, which often leads their listeners to forget their worldly troubles while they listen. "Simplicity of thought and style, rural frankness and unsophistication are the very keynote of these ballads. These are neither sensual nor intellectual but strictly moral, i.e., agreeable to the moral nature of the common village-folk. The Patuas more or less followed the style of medieaval (sic) Bengali language and never at all that of the modern in composing these ballads".<sup>2</sup> Thus the Paṭuās not only entertain the people by exhibiting patas and by reciting stories, but also serve as an important organ of rural education.

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1. Cf. Indian Folklore, Vol.1, No.1, 1956, pp.62, 66.

2. Ibid., p.68.



(VI) Other methods - In some cases one individual recites the story in an attractive way before a village assembly throughout the month of Śrāvāna. A limited part of the story is recited on each day.<sup>1</sup> It is reported that "in some of the districts of East Bengal the women of respectable families also recite the story in their own way, which sometimes excels the performances of the professional male reciters. But they do not appear before the public; they draw listeners from the female members mostly from their own and their neighbours' families".<sup>2</sup>

Thus besides its importance from the point of view of religion, the legend of Manasā has served as an object of folk entertainment down to the present century. It may be inferred that many of these practices had their origin some centuries earlier. The change of economic structure and the influence of urban culture on the village folk have brought about a substantial change in the minds of the villagers. As a result they are now more inclined to the entertainments of urban civilisation and all these earlier forms of entertainment are becoming obsolete.

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1. Ibid., No.3, 1958, p.29.

2. Indian Folk-Lore, vol.1.No.3,1958, p.29.

### Summary and Conclusion

Our attempt throughout has been to throw light on the history of the goddess Manasā. In tracing the history of the goddess we have also considered the history of snake cult in Ancient India, as some of the beliefs<sup>1</sup> anciently associated with that cult, are found in connection with Manasā.<sup>2</sup> As a goddess of snakes Manasā inherited a body of beliefs widely current throughout India. It is interesting to note that no snake goddess was known in those days in any other part of India, comparable to Manasā, though the worship of Nāginīs as snake-spirits were current from the earliest times.<sup>3</sup> The goddess evolved in Bengal under a peculiar socio-religious background<sup>4</sup> from the Pālas onwards and her complex nature can be properly understood only against the peculiar religious background of Bengal.

A detailed analysis of the Manasāmaṅgalkāvyas suggests that the narrative written in honour of Manasā is a compilation of different legends and stories, either developed or incorporated in different times. These are (i) epic and Purānic stories and (ii) secular stories, some associated

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1. Supra, pp. 61-64, 66-72.

2. Supra, pp. 429-435

3. Supra, pp. 594

4. Chapter II.

with divinities. The former stories were incorporated in the narrative of Manasā by the Manasāmaṅgal poets in order to give Manasā a status in society, as she had her origin among the lower class people. The process of incorporation is best exemplified by the fantastic passages in which Manasā is said to have been born from Siva's semen. This tendency of the poets was to connect the low-born goddess Manasā with Siva so that the higher class people found no difficulty in worshipping her. The process which was started by the Manasāmaṅgal poets was completed by the authors of the later Purāṇas who depict Manasā as a great goddess, having no connection with the secular stories of popular origin. In these Purāṇas Manasā is depicted as the mind-born daughter of the sage Kaśyapa, as the disciple of Siva, and the devotee of Kṛishṇa.<sup>1</sup>

Different theories have been postulated both in regard to the original location as well as the historicity of the principal legend of Manasā. Some scholars have suggested Bihar as the early home of the legend.<sup>2</sup> Others support the claim of South India.<sup>3</sup> Yet others have proposed a West Bengal origin of the cult and the legend.<sup>4</sup> From

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1. Supra, pp. 186-191, 207-210.

2. Supra, pp. 214-219.

3. Supra, pp. 220-229.

4. Supra, pp. 232-240.

our own researches we support the last theory, which gains strength from the analysis of the textual materials, from the rites and ceremonies connected with Manasā, and from the local traditions.<sup>1</sup> As regards the historicity of the principal legend a similar controversy prevails. We have concluded that some prototype of the legendary hero Chāndo existed in Bengali society in the 10th-11th centuries A.D. An endeavour has also been made to determine the date of the origin of the cult of Manasā which we tentatively place in the 9th-10th centuries at the latest.<sup>2</sup>

We have reconstructed the gradual evolution of the goddess as far as it is traceable by analysing the textual materials. Manasā, who was first worshipped by the non-Aryans as represented by cowherds, farmers and fishermen, gained popularity slowly among the women-folk of the upper classes and then among their men-folk including the Brahmans. The goddess was not confined to the Hindus, for her worship by the Bengali Muslims can be traced back to the 15th century A.D. Even today some Muslims of West Bengal directly or indirectly take part in Manasā worship.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Supra, pp. 258 - 264 .

2. Supra, pp. 264 - 270 .

3. Chapter V.

We have also traced the relations of Manasā with the other important and popular cult divinities of mediaeval Bengal. In doing this we have found evidence of an early conflict between the devotees of two local deities - Maṅgal Chaṇḍī and Manasā. We have suggested that the invasion of Bengal by the Muslims brought about a significant change in the field of religion. As a result not only the ruling classes but also their patron gods lost their popularity and the people began to think that both their rulers and their deities were incapable of protecting them. On this political background the local deities became popular and a vernacular literature grew up to propagate their enormous power in comparison with that of the classical deities, especially of Śiva. The votaries of those local deities increased in number and formed a united front against the votaries of Śiva as represented by Chāṇḍo, Dhanapati and Chandraketu of the Manasā, Chaṇḍī and Śitalā Kāvya respectively.<sup>1</sup>

It is very significant that Manasā is nowhere referred to as worshipped in the form of an icon and that the actual identity of the images hitherto described and catalogued as of

Manasā is still uncertain. The worship of a local deity in the form of an icon is rather unusual in India, for such a deity is often symbolised by a shapeless piece of stone. The images in question cannot be those of a village deity. It is most likely that they were carved for temple worship - a worship which would not be expected in the case of Manasā in such an early period as the 9th<sup>or 10th</sup> century, to which some of the images date back. The dhyānas and descriptions of Manasā which conform to the images in question in some respects were composed in terms of these images which were then utilized as symbols of Manasā in some places because snakes appeared in them.<sup>1</sup>

Various claims have been put forward by scholars on the heredity of Manasā. They have suggested that Manasā had her origin in Sarasvatī, Jāṅgulī, Padmāvati and other goddesses. The evidence cited by them is not convincing and we have concluded that Manasā originated independently as is evident from the Manasākāvyas and other literature and from the religious ceremonies performed in her honour.<sup>2</sup>

The rites and ceremonies connected with Manasā from

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1. Supra, pp. 382 - 383

1. Supra, pp. 382 - 383

2. Supra, pp. 356 - 376

the earliest times to the present day are numerous and have many local variations. From a careful analysis of these rites it is clear that the rites which are observed now are more or less similar to those outlined in the poems. The methods and places of the worship of Manasā, the days of her worship, the priestly functions and sacrificial offerings and purposes of her worship in Bengal, Tripura, Assam and Bihar together show that the cult has been practised for many centuries. Besides the importance of the cult in religion, the principal legend of Manasā serves as an object of folk entertainment in various ways.<sup>1</sup>

The replacement of agricultural economy by industrial economy in urban India has brought a substantial change in occupation. This change has to some extent affected all the social groups in their social order and outlook. As a result the traditional way of living based on simplicity and sincerity has gone through a significant change. The old methods of entertainment which are the products of the masses and often sponsored by the village landlords, have been replaced by modern methods of entertainment such as the cinema and theatre. Thus the urban culture is more and more affecting the unsophisticated rural culture.

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1. Supra, pp. 494-501.



The community life of the simple villagers is now in danger. A similar influence has been felt by folk-religion. This change in the economic order which has brought about changes in the methods of life such as shifting the focus of life from the villages to the towns and cities, has forced the popular rites and beliefs into the background, and many of them have died out.

In such circumstances, it may be asked what will be the future of the cult of Manasā. The answer is a very sad one. It seems that this goddess will die within a century or so. Enthusiasm for her worship is gradually passing away, and is mostly confined to the uneducated villagers, who still have some faith in her practical utility. Among the educated her worship is more or less conventional<sup>al</sup>. The goddess who had her origin in fear, will not be propitiated when the people in general obtain effective medicine against snake bite. Such medicine is already in use but it is not always effective. Moreover the availability of anti-venom serum in the villages and its cost still stand as a great hindrance to the use of it. As the well-to-do city people obtain the advantages of modern medicine, they care little for Manasā. But as long as there is no anti-venom serum available in the villages, the goddess will be propitiated by the villagers. With the spread of education and scientific medicine, however,



she will become obsolete. Unless India goes back to the social structure and the pattern of life which she had down to the early 20th century, the future will probably allow little room for popular religious rites and beliefs.

Though we apprehend for the future of the cult, it may well be that those parts of the narrative poems of Manasā which are rich in human and moral elements - the ideal of chastity, strength of character and purity of life - will remain forever as a source of joy and inspiration. More than two thousand years have passed since the epics were composed, but still our village people sing the more moral parts of the Rāmāyana and the Mahābhārata. Similar is the appeal of the character of Behulā of the Manasākāvya to the Bengalis.

# Appendices

## A. A list of the Manasāmaṅgal poets

### BIENGAL

The following poets are known to have written Manasā poems. The list is based on that of D.C.Sen,<sup>1</sup> with additions. Those poets marked with an asterisk are described below.

- |                       |                          |
|-----------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. Anup Chandra       | *18. Dvija Baṁśīdās      |
| 2. Balarām Das        | 19. Dvija Hari Rām       |
| 3. Ballabha Ghose     | 20. Dvija Hriday         |
| 4. Baṁśīdhan          | 21. Dvija Jay Rām        |
| 5. Banamālī           | *22. Dvija Rasik Chandra |
| *6. Baneśvar          | *23. Gaṅgādās Sen        |
| 7. Bardhamān Dās      | 24. Gobinda Dās          |
| 8. Bijay              | 25. Golak Chandra        |
| *9. Bijay Gupta       | 26. Gopi Chandra         |
| *10. Bipradās         | 27. Haridās              |
| 11. Bipra Jagannāth   | *28. Hari Datta          |
| 12. Bipra Janakināth. | 29. Jadunāth Paṇḍit      |
| 13. Biprarām Dās      | *30. Jagamohan Mitra     |
| 14. Biprarata Deb.    | 31. Jagannāth Sen        |
| 15. Biśveśvar         | 32. Jagat Ballabha       |
| 16. Chandrapati       | 33. Jānakīnāth Dās       |
| 17. Dvija Balarām     | 34. Jaydeb Dās           |

1. Sen, H.B.L.L., pp. 277-294.

- |                      |                     |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| 35. Kamal Nārāyaṇ    | 47. Rām Chandra     |
| 36. Kavī Karnapur    | 48. Rām Nidhi       |
| 37. Kṛishṇānanda     | 49. Rāmdās Sen      |
| 38. Madhusūdan De    | *50. Rāmjīban       |
| 39. Nanda Lāl        | 51. Rāmākānta       |
| 40. Nārāyaṇ          | 52. Rati Kānta Sen  |
| *41. Nārāyaṇ Deb     | *53. Shashthbar Sen |
| 42. Paṇḍit Gaṅgā Dās | 54. Sitapati        |
| 43. Rādhā Kṛishṇa    | 55. Sudām Dās       |
| 44. Raghunāth        | 56. Sukavi Dās      |
| 45. Rājā Rājsimha    | 57. Sukha Dās       |
| 46. Rām Binod        | *58. Vishṇu Pāl     |

### 12th-13th centuries

1. Hari Datta - He is believed to be the earliest known poet of Manasākāvya. Reference to him as the first poet to write on this theme is made in the version of Bijay Gupta. None of his manuscripts has been found. Only a few of his poems, bearing the bhanitā, the name of the poet, in the final couplet of every poem, are found in the versions of later poets. His poems have been found in Mymensingh which tempts us to think that he was probably an inhabitant of this district. He has been to the 12th or 13th century.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Supra, pp. 268 f.

### 15th century

2. Bijay Gupta - One of the greatest and most popular poets of Manasā, he lived Gailā (-phullasri) in Bakarganj and was a Vaidya. From his own account it is known that he wrote poems in the Śaka year 1416 (A.D.1494) as ordered by the goddess in a dream. His version has been published in various editions.<sup>1</sup>

3. Bipradās - Four manuscripts of this poet's work have been found in the villages Dattapukhur and (Chota) Jaguliya in 24-Parganas. According to the text he was an inhabitant of Nādudyā or Bādudyā near Baṭagrām and belonged to a Brahman family. He wrote his poems when he was asked in a dream by the goddess herself in Vaiśākha of the Śaka year 1417 (A.D.1495).<sup>2</sup>

4. Nārāyaṇ Deb - He is the most popular poet of Manasā in east Bengal and in some parts of Assam especially in the district of Mymensingh. He was a Kāyastha and lived in the village of Borgrām in Mymensingh. His ancestors had migrated to this village from west Bengal. His version also exists in a few editions. An Assamese version of his poem has also been published. He has been assigned to the latter half of the 15th century or earlier.<sup>3</sup>

1. Bijay Gupta, op.cit., Ed. Das Gupta, P., Introduction; Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp.238-249; Sen, H.B.L.L., pp.278-283.
2. Bipradās, op.cit., Intro. pp.1-5; Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp.249-253.
3. Sen, H.B.L.L., pp.283-287; Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp.227-238; Nārāyaṇ Deb, op.cit., Intro. pp. 14-30; Bipradās, op.cit., Intro., p.17.

16th century.

5. Gaṅgādās Sen - He was an inhabitant of the village of Dinidīp (present Jināradi) in the district of Dacca. His version has not been published.<sup>1</sup>

17th century.

6. Ketakādās-Kshemānanda - He was an inhabitant of west Bengal, possibly of Burdwan. He is believed to have been a Kāyastha. He flourished in the middle of the 17th century. He was the only popular poet of Manasā in west Bengal. Several manuscripts have been found from different places, and a few have been edited. Scholars believe that different poets existed bearing the same name, Kshemānanda.<sup>2</sup>

7. Jagajjīban Ghosāl - A brahman of the village Kuchiyāmora, which is now in the Purnia district of Bihar. He was the only thoroughly representative north Bengal poet. He has been assigned to the middle of the 17 century.<sup>3</sup>

8. Baṁśīdās - He was born in the village of Pātuārī in Kishorganj subdivision of Mymensingh, of six miles west of the birth place of Nārāyaṇ Deb. He was a Brahman bearing the surname Chakravarti. He is also known as Baṁśīvadan or Dviija Baṁśīdās. He is dated to the second half of the 17th century. His version has been published several

1. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp.252-253.

2. Sen, H.B.L.L., pp.288-292; Ketakādās, op.cit., Intro. pp.1-18; Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp.262-268; Bipradās, op.cit., Intro., pp.13-15.

3. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp.268-286; Bipradās, op.cit., Intro. pp.20-21; Jagajjīban, op.cit., Intro. pp.14-19.

editions.<sup>1</sup>

9. Kālidās - He belonged to either Birbhum or Burdwan as is evident from the place names of his version of the story, apparently located in these two districts. He wrote his Manasākāvya in 1697.<sup>2</sup>

10. Shashthibar Datta - He was probably an inhabitant of Sylhet and a member of the Vaidya caste. He has been assigned to the latter years of the 17th century. His manuscripts have been published from Sylhet.<sup>3</sup>

17th-18th centuries.

11. Vishnu Pāl - He was an inhabitant of west Bengal and his manuscripts have all been collected from west Burdwan and Birbhum. According to local tradition he belonged to the potter caste. His version can be dated in the 17th or 18th century.<sup>4</sup>

18th century.

12. Rāmjīban - His full name was Rāmjīban Bhattacharya Vidyābhusan. He wrote his Mansasākāvya in the Saka year 1625 (A.D.1703). He lived in the village of Banśkhāli in the district of Chittagong.<sup>5</sup>

1. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp.253-261.

2. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp.261-262.

3. Ibid., pp. 286-303.

4. Bipradās, op.cit., Intro., pp. 9-13; Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp.308-311.

5. Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp. 303-304.

13. Sitārām Dās - He was an inhabitant of west Bengal.

His version called Kamalākīrtan or Kamalāmaṅgal, was composed in 1708.<sup>1</sup>

14. Bāneśvar Rāy - He belonged to west Bengal. His

narrative was written in 1719. His own account states

that he was born in Rāipur<sup>2</sup> and lived in Champakpuri.

These places cannot be located with certainty.

15. Jīban Kṛishṇa Maitra - He belonged to the Varendra

Brahman family of the village Lāhiripārā in the district

of Bogra. He wrote his Kāvya in 1744.<sup>3</sup>

#### 18th-19th centuries

16. Dvija Rasik - The full name of the poet was Rasik

Miśra. He was an inhabitant of west Bengal. He has

been assigned to either the last years of the 18th century

or the 1st quarter of the 19th.<sup>4</sup>

#### 19th century

17. Jagamohan Mitra - He wrote his Kāvya in 1844.<sup>5</sup>

18. Dvija Kālīprasanna - He was an inhabitant of the

village Mallikpur in the district of Jessore. His full

name was Kālīprasanna Bandopadhyay. His version was

written in 1860.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Bipradās, op.cit., Intro., pp. 15-16.

2. Ibid., p. 16; Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp.311-313.

3. Ibid., pp. 25-26; Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp.304-307.

4. Ibid., p.16; Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp.307-308.

5. Bipradās, op.cit., Intro., p.29; Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., p. 313.

6. Ibid.,; Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., pp.313f.

19. Kusa--(Kuśala) Deb Pāl - He wrote his Kāvya in 1869.<sup>1</sup>

20. Chaitanyadās Maṇḍal - He was an inhabitant of Bankatī in Manbhum district, Bihar. His Kāvya was written in 1881.<sup>2</sup> His version was published four times, lastly in 1914.<sup>3</sup>

21. Rādhānāth Rāy Chaudhuri - He belonged to Sylhet and wrote his narrative in 1882.<sup>4</sup> It was published in 1912 from Sylhet.<sup>5</sup>

22. Maheśchandra Das De - He wrote his Kāvya in 1882.<sup>6</sup> 20th century.

23. Gobinda Chandra Siṃha - He lived in the village of Aśilā under Rājmaḥal subdivision in the Santal Parganas. He wrote his narrative in B.S. 1312 (A.D.1905), which was published in 1932.<sup>7</sup>

Gobinda Chandra Siṃha was the last Manasā poet known to us to write a Kāvya in the traditional style; but a few modern Bengali poets have dealt with the theme either in full or in part in a contemporary manner. These include: Charu Sila Devi, Kalidas Ray, Kumud Ranjan Mallik, S.B. Das Gupta and others. Frequent references to Behulā occur in the poems of Gībanananda Das.

1. Ibid.
2. Ibid.
3. Chaitanyadās Maṇḍal, Manasā Maṅgal, (Pub.by) Datta, D.G.
4. Bipradās, op.cit., Intro., p.29; Bhattacharya, B.M.K.I., p.314.
5. Rādhānāth Rāy Chaudhuri, Padmāpurāṇ, (Pub.by) Ray Chaudhuri, D.N.
6. Bipradās, op.cit., Intro., p.29.
7. Gobind Chandra Siṃha, Srīmanasāmāṅgal Dhuyābālī, (Pub.by) Sarkar, K.P., Introduction.



It can be inferred that a vast literature grew up in Bengal centred on the goddess Manasā. Besides these long narrative poems which were planned by the authors themselves in such a way as would enable the professional singers to sing them part by part on consecutive days, many dramas were written on the theme down to the first quarter of the present century.<sup>1</sup> The performance of these dramas by villagers was very common in former days.

#### ASSAM

1. Manakar - He was one of the early poets of Assamese literature, and has been assigned to the 15th or 16th century. He was probably the contemporary of King Viśva-Siṃha of Kāmatā (1517-1544) who has been identified with the King of Kāmatā and Jalpeśvar to whom the poet paid homage at the beginning of his writings.<sup>2</sup>

2. Durgābar - The exact place of his birth cannot be located with certainty but it has been suggested that he belonged to Hajo in the district of Kamrup as his version is widely popular in that area and his manuscripts have been found there. But though he is supposed to have been

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1. Sarat Kumar Sen, Bhāsan Yātrā Bā Manasā-Maṅgal Gītābhinay, 6th edition, Calcutta, B.S.1826; Panchanan Ray Chaudhuri, Manasā-Mahimā (Gītābhinay), 2nd edition, Calcutta, B.S.1316; Hara Nath Vasu, Behulā, Calcutta, B.S.1317.
  2. Manasā-Kāvya, Intro., pp.14-22.

a resident of Hajo, it is known from the textual evidence that he wrote his Behulā story after he had resided in the hills of Nilāchal.<sup>1</sup> He was also a contemporary of Viśva-Siṃha.<sup>2</sup>

3. Phellaram Datta - His Kāvya entitled "Manasā-Purān" was published in 1830.<sup>3</sup>

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1. Manasā-Kāvya, p.125.

2. Ibid., Intro., pp.22-26.

3. Phellaram Datta, Manasā-Purān, Jorahat, Assam, 1930.

B. A list of the names and epithets of Manasā according to different sources:--

1. Bengali texts

- (1) Padmā or Padmāvatī
- (2) Vishahari or Vishaharī
- (3) Kānī or Kāni
- (4) Jāguli or Jāguli
- (5) Jagatī
- (6) Brahmānī or Brahmāni
- (7) Jaratkāru
- (8) Totalā or Totolā
- (9) Jagatgauri or Jagatgaurī
- (10) Jagatjananī
- (11) Jagatīśvarī
- (12) Ketakā
- (13) Nāgeśvarī
- (14) Yogeśvarī
- (15) Sarasayoginī
- (16) Nirvāsinī
- (17) Svetāambarī
- (18) Parvatavāsinī
- (19) Patimandadarī
- (20) Pātālkumārī
- (21) Mandākshī

2. Assamese texts

- (1) Padmā or Padumāi
- (2) Vishaharī
- (3) Brahmānī

3. The Purānas

- (1) Vishaharī
- (2) Jaratkāru
- (3) Jagatgaurī
- (4) Jaratkārupriyā
- (5) Āstikamātā
- (6) Nāgabhoginī
- (7) Nāgeśvarī
- (8) Vaishṇavī
- (9) Saivī
- (10) Siddhayoginī
- (11) Mahājñānayutā

4. Names of Manasā current in more than one district of West Bengal (Based on Survey Letters)

Different names of Manasā	Bankura	Birbhum	Burdwan	Cooch-Behar	Darjeeling	Hooghly	Howrah	Jalpaiguri	Malda	Midnapur	Murshidabad	Nadia	24-Parganas	West-Dinajpur	Total no. of the district where she is worshipped
Vishaharī	6	7	10	5	1	1	2	12	16	9	5	3	3	14	14
Padmā or Padmāvati	1	3	3	4	X	X	5	5	8	4	5	2	2	4	12
Jagatgaurī	3	X	10	X	X	1	X	X	X	1	X	X	X	1	5
Nagamātā	1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1	2	1	X	X	1	5
Ketakā	X	X	X	X	X	1	X	X	X	1	1	X	X	X	3
Jaratkaru	X	1	X	X	X	X	1	X	X	1	X	X	X	X	3
Kamālā	1	4	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	3
Mārāi or Marakī	X	3	X	1	X	X	X	2	X	X	X	X	X	X	3
Sītālā	X	11	X	X	X	X	1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	2
Sākambharī	1	1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	2
Nāgapūjā	X	X	1	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1	2
Nāgeśvarī	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	1	X	1	X	X	X	2

Numeral given above is the number/numbers of informant/informants.

Besides the names described above, Manasā is known and worshipped under the following names in different districts.

1. Bankura - Kālīmā (1), Vāsulī (1), Siṃhavāhinī (1).
2. Birbhum - Chintāmani (4), Haṃsavāhinī (4), Bagā (2), Duloramā (1), Maṅgal Chaṇḍī (1), Jagatmātā (1), Śivānī (1), Didithākrun (1), Pātālkumārī (1), Basantakumārī (1), Padmavāhinī (1).
3. Burdwan - Jhaṃkeśvarī or Jhāṅklāi (5), Brahmānī (3), Jagatī (3), Kānāi Chaṇḍī (2), Pāṅchkuli (1), Pītāmvarī (1), Bankumārī (1), Mauli (1), Gāchh Pūjā (1), Pañchānan (1), Dharmarāj (1).
4. Hooghly - Vishalakshmī (1)
5. Howrah - Jāguli (1), Sarpamātā (1), Pañchadevata (1).
6. Jalpaiguri - Śrāvaṇīvrata (1), Bhādāivrata (1).
7. 24-Parganas - Cheṅgamurikānī (1)

The numeral given in the bracket is the number/numbers of informant/informants testifying to the use of the name in question.

C. A table of equivalent English months in relation to our months.

Vaiśākha.....	April-May
Jyāishṭha.....	May-June
Ashāḍha.....	June-July
Śrāvaṇa.....	July-August
Bhādra.....	August-September
Āśvina.....	September-October
Kārtika.....	October-November
Agrāhayana or Mārgaśīrsha.....	November-December
Pausha.....	December-January
Māgha.....	January-February
Phālguna.....	February-March
Chaitra.....	March-April

Each of these months roughly covers the days starting from the middle of one English month to the middle of the next one, e.g., Vaiśākha (middle of April to the middle of May). It is to be noted that the unified National Calendar of India based on the Śaka Era has not been used in our work, though it has come into force from March 22nd, 1957.

D. Specimen of a completed questionnaire translated  
from Bengali.

## QUESTIONNAIRE

L.No.14.

Place of information: Ahdra, Dist.Bankura

Name and Address of informant: Gauranga Mahanti, Headmaster,  
Ahdra Jnr.High School,  
P.O.Ahdra, Bankura.

1. What percentage of the population worship Manasā in your locality?

98%

2. Is she worshipped family-wise or by the community in a public place?

Both are current.

3. Which section of the Hindus worships her widely?

All classes of the Hindus worship her.

4. Is the worship conducted by a Brahman priest or some other priest among the lower classes?

The priestly function of the upper classes is performed by the Brahmans, whereas the lower classes have their own priests.

5. Is she worshipped in the form of an image or a pot?

Both are current.

6. Are stone symbols used in her worship?

They are current in some places.

7. What are the materials required for her worship?

Fruits, sweets, sunned rice, curd, milk, honey, plantain, betel, betel-nut, a twig of sij, sandal paste, a piece of cloth, twigs of five trees, five kinds of powder, vermilion, incense, fragments of resin and a drawing of eight nāgas, made of rice paste.

8. What places is she worshipped in (e.g. under a tree, etc.)?

Either in the shrines of Manasā or under the sij trees.

9. Is there any animal sacrifice before the goddess?

Goats and pigeons are sacrificed.

10. Is there any worship of snakes besides Manasā?

Along with Manasā snakes are propitiated.

11. What are the dates of worship?

Daśaharā in Jyāishṭha, Nāgapañchamī in Āshāḍha, last day of Śrāvaṇa, of Bhādra and of Āśvina.

12. What is the Mantra?

oṃ devimambhāmahīnāṃ śaśādharaavadanāṃ chārūkāntiṃ  
vadānyāṃ haṃsārūdhāmadārāmaruṇitavasanāṃ sarvadāṃ sarvadaiva/  
smerāsyāṃ maṇḍitāṅgīṃ kanakamaṇigaṇairnāgaratnairanekair



vande'ham sāshtanāgāmurūkuchayugalām bhoginīm kāmārūpām //

13. Is any religious vow (vrata) made at the time of her worship?

Yes.

14. Is there any performance of Manasā songs?

Yes.

15. Do the snake charmers (Sānpuriā) worship her?

Yes.

16. What is/are the reason/reasons for worshipping her?

Freedom from fear of snakes and for the fulfilment of any desire.

17. Has any image of the goddess unearthed in your place?

No.

18. Is she worshipped by any other name?

She is worshipped by the names Padmā and Vishahārī.

19. Do the Muslims worship her?

No.

E. Chart showing the approximate percentage of worshippers in different districts of west Bengal.

Name of the district	No. of letters posted	No. of letters received	Approx. percentage of worshippers
1. Bankura	63	29	91
2. Birbhum	75	40	86
3. Burdwan	91	34	86
4. Cooch-Behar	14	6	90
5. Darjeeling	24	2	30
6. Hooghly	40	13	91
7. Howrah	40	17	94
8. Jalpaiguri	39	16	74
9. Malda	50	20	68
10. Midnapur	95	52	89
11. Murshidabad	61	25	81
12. Nadia	41	16	88
13. 24-Parganas	72	24	88
14. West Dinajpur	30	17	95
TOTAL.....	735	311	

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G. List of Informants

Letter No.

BANKURA

1. Hari Sadhan Mukhopadhyay, Vill and P.O. Kakatiya, Jr.  
High School Kakatiya.
2. Ranjit kumar Bandyopadhyay, B.A., Vill. Belia, P.O.  
Jambedya.
3. Abanibhusan Sahu, Vill. Raipur, P.O. Raipur.
4. Yamini Mohon Panda Vill. and P.O. Dolderiya.
5. Sudhir kumar Haldar Vill. and P.O. Birsingha, Banabirsingha  
Vidyamandir.
6. Surendranath Mandal Vill. Rajsol, P.O. Jaypur, Jaypur Jr.  
High School.
7. Parvati Bhusan kumar. Vill. Waital, P.O. Waital.
8. Dhirendranath Chaudhuri, Vill. and P.O. Bankadaha, Junior  
High School.
9. Chittaranjan Patra, Vill. and P.O. Jamjuri.
10. Radharaman Sarkar, P.O. Bijpur, Bijpur Jr. High School.
11. Sasanka Sekhar Patra Vill. Chotakupra, P.O. Ratanpur, Jr.  
High School.
12. Annada Charan Bhattacharya Vill. and P.O. Panchal, Panchal  
High School.
13. Nityananda Ghose, Vill. <sup>+ P.O.-</sup> Madanmohan ~~ampur~~, Madanmohan ~~an~~ Jr. High  
School.

14. Gauranga Mahanti, Vill. and P.O. Ahdra, Jr. High School.
15. Bibhuti Bhusan De P.O. Bhagaldighi, Jr. High School.
16. Maniklal Singha, Vishnupur, Wangiya Sahitya Parisat.
17. Kamalakanta Chakravarti, Vill. Maulasol, P.O. Ludka, Jr. High School.
18. Ramkrishna Chakravarti, P.O. Andahi, Jr. High School.
19. Jitendra Kumar Saha, Vill. and P.O. Bamuntod.
20. Yamini mohon Panda, Vill. and P.O. Guniyada, Jr. High School.
21. Satyakinkar Barat Vill. Shyampur, P.O. Saltoya.
22. Narayan Prasad Chattopadhyay, P.O. Bohar, Jr. High School.
23. Ramdas Chatterjee, P.O. Kerjakhra, Molebara High School.
24. Nityanaudapur Jr. High School. P.O. Nityanandapur.
25. Indra Narayen Ray, P.O. Kadma, High School.
26. Jotindranath Banerjee. P.O. Ratra. P.S. Indas, Bahalpur Junior High School.
27. Anil Kumar Goswami P.O. Jayrambati, Ramkrishna Mission Sardda Vidyapith.
28. Gurudas Chakravorti Vill. and P.O. Belut.
29. Ramkrishna Mission Vidyalay, Purulia.

#### BIRBHUM

1. Kali Sadhan Banerji Vill. Naisar P.O. Narayaupur, Junior High School.
2. Amulyakumar Thakur Vill. and P.O. Purandarpur, High School.

3. Gaura Gopal Ghosh, B.A., B.T. P.O. Ilambazar, High School.
4. Bhairabnath Sarkar Vill. and P.O. Baliarpur, Junior High School.
5. Ayas Junior High School, P.O. Ayas.
6. Niranjana Mandal, M.A., B.T. Vill. and P.O. Madhaipur, Pallimangal Bidyalay.
7. Satyanarayan Ganguli, Vyakaran Tirtha, P.O. Rampur, Bishu-upur High School.
8. Sanatan Mandal P.O. Deucha, Junior High School.
9. Sourin Kumar Paul P.O. Satpalsa, Junior High School.
10. Anadi Kumar Garai P.O. Hatserandi, Junior High School.
11. Manik Chandra Banerji P.O. Kanachi, Junior High School.
12. Shyamapada Mukhopadhyay P.O. Kota, Sirsa Sailajakauta Jr. High School.
13. Chittaranjan Mukhopadhyay B.A. Vill. Bajitpur, P.O. Pathai, Jr. High School.
14. Santi Kumar Banerjee Vill. and P.O. Daksingram, Jr. High School.
15. Binoy Krishna Datta Vill. Bagra Kanda, P.O. Ahamadpur Howrah Anchal Panchayet.
16. Shyamapada Acarya, Kavya-Vyakarantirtha Jyotirbhusan P.O. Mahodari, tatina-para catuspathi.
17. Amar Singha Dhar Vill. and P.O. Lokpur, High School.

18. Sasanka Sekhar Karmakar and  
Gauri Sankar Bhattacharya P.O. Dubrajpur, Sri Sri Sarada  
Bidyapitha.
19. Manik Kumar Das, P.O. Bosoya, Laha Nisparun Jr. High School.
20. Hiranmay Mandal Vill. and P.O. Smar Kunda, Jr. High School.
21. Ambika Charan Ray, Vill. Ratgada.
22. Balaram Bhattacharya, P.O. Puranagram, Heruka Junior High  
School.
23. Achyutananda Chakravarti, Vill. and P.O. Jilui, Junior  
High School. (Kavya-Vyakaran tirtha.)
24. Jagatjiban Singha Vill. and P.O. Kharbona.
25. Sasanka Acharya, Kavyatirtha, P.O. Barhra, Navasau Junior  
High School.
26. Mahadev Bhattacharya, Vill. and P.O. Ganapur, Junior High  
School.
27. Sibakinkar Bhattacharya Vill. and P.O. Dekhudiya, Jay-  
krishnapur Jr. School.
28. Sekh Altaf Hosen, Vill. Pandui, P.O. Gadgade, Panrui Union.  
Amjad Jr. High School.
29. Mukti Bose, B.A.B.T. P.O. Kirnahar, Tavapada Memorials  
Girls' School.
30. Sambhunath Banerjee, B.A., L.M.P., Vill. Dahira, P.O. Jewe.
31. Chittaranjan Ray P.O. Bolpur (Nichupatti)
32. Debendravijay Kavyatirtha. P.O. Popada-Sahapur, Jr. High  
School.

33. Yatindramoh~~on~~ Basu P.O. Sattor, Vill. Jadabpur.
34. Purusottam Ghosh, Vill. Beluti, P.O. Charkalgram, Beluti  
M.K.D.M. High School.
35. Ramranjan Chattopadhyay, Vill. Andranagar, Jr. High  
School.
36. Ananda Gopal Mitra, Vill. Penga, P.O. Prakurhas, Gonna  
Serandi Jr. High School.
37. Birendra Kumar Roy P.O. Kasthagora, Jr. High School.
38. Madhusudan Garain P.O. Dubrajpur
39. Prodyotkumar Mandal Vill. and P.O. Singi.
40. Amita Ranjan Mukhopadhyay, Vill. Bandhranipur P.O.  
Kuliyara. Lokpara Primary School.

#### BURDWAN

1. Nimai ~~Ch~~and Datta, Vill. and P.O. Palita, Jr. High School.
2. Krishnachandra Pal Vill. and P.O. Masagram.
3. Nirmal Kanti Ghosh Vill. Bamunia, P.O. Hijabra, Bamunia  
Jr. High School.
4. Bhabesh Chandra Chakravarti, Vill. and P.O. Raidogachia.
5. Bebhuti Bhusan Bhattacharya Vill. Anguna, P.O. Bedugram.
6. Munindranath Kundu Vill. and P.O. Kanchannagar, Dinanathdas  
Jr. High School.
7. Gauri Saukar Chattopadhyay Vill. Ichapur, P.O. Baharkuli.
8. Yamini Ranjan Mandal, M.A. Vill. Ita, P.O. Ksiragram.
9. Sibapada Chattopadhyay, P.O. Laksinipur, Via. Patuli,  
Laksmipur Jr. School.

10. Chakrendubhusan Ray, Kavyatirtha, Vill. Bharatpur, P.O. Silampur Silampur Jr. School.
11. Headmaster, Purulia Jr. School, Vill. and P.O. Parulia.
12. Chaitanyakali Chattopadhyay, B.A. P.O. Koyarpur.
11. Headmaster, Purulia Jr. School, Vill. and P.O. Parulia.
12. Chaitanyakali Chattopadhyay, B.A. P.O. Koyarpur.
13. Surya kumar Ray, Vill. and P.O. Sidrai, Jr. School.
14. { Sekh Khodanoyaj B.Sc., and  
 { Santi Kumar Pal, B.A. and  
 { Mrityunjay Bhattacharya, Kavyatirtha
15. Debendranath Rauth, Vill. and P.O. Saknada.
16. Amiya Kumar Biswas, Vill. and P.O. Daminya Kair Kaukar.
17. Jagabandhu Seth, Vill. and P.O. Pahalanpur, Rayna.
18. Mrinal Kanti Bhattacharjee, Vill. Bau Kapasi, P.O. Bazar Bau Kapasi, Jr. High School.
19. Dibakar Singha, Vill. and P.O. Sudpur.
20. { Gopinath De, B.Sc. B.T. Cholobainar Jr. High School.  
 { Madan Mohan Kavya Purana Tirtha  
 P.O. Chotobainan.
21. Kalidas Bhattacharya, Vill. and P.O. Orgram.
22. Kamala Kanta Gupta } Vill. Mithapur, P.O. Guhagram, Mithapur  
 Amiya Bhattacharya } Jr. High School.
23. Rambilas Bhattacharya Vill. and P.O. Pasanda, Jr. High School.
24. Jyotsna Khasnabis, Vill. and P.O. Amadpur.

25. Dharmadas De, Vill. Nutangram, P.O. Haldi-naspara,  
Haldipara R.C. Jr. High School.
26. Rasaraj Goswami, Vill. and P.O. Anukhal, Jr. High School.
27. Sailendranath Mukherjee, Vill. Tetulia, P.O. Bhita  
School.
28. Rajkumar ~~Ain~~, Vill. Dattapara, P.O. Kulingram, Dattapara  
Bhuvaneswari Jr. High School.
29. ~~Students~~ <sup>Teachers</sup> <sup>Students</sup> <sup>Senior Basic</sup> (of Ramnagar) ~~(Ucca-Buniyadi)~~ School, Vill. Ramnagar,  
P.O. North Ramnagar.
30. Amiya kumar Dan, Vill. and P.O. Saranga.
31. Kanan Kumar Pal, Vill. Jagadagram, P.O. Panchkula,  
Jagadabad Senior Basic School.
32. B.Banerjee. P.O. Kalikapur Agradurip Union Madhyamik  
Vidyalaya.
33. D.Roy, Bajekumarpur Jr. High School, P.O. Bajekumarpur.
34. Sristidhar Smrititirtha, Kali Catuspathi, P.O. Katowa.

#### COOCH-BEHAR

1. Harinath Chaudhuri, Nilkuthi.
2. Hrishikesh Chakravarti, Vill. and P.O. Nigampur.
3. Baksir Hat High School, Vill. and P.O. Bakshirhat.
4. Kamala Niyogi, Sunty Academy.
5. Gaura Chandra Pal Vill. Ghegirghat, P.O. Deoyanghat.
6. Narendranath Sarkar, Vill. and P.O. Barkodali, Barkodali  
Jr. High School.

## DARJEELING

1. Radharanjan Nath, Dumrigudi Junior High School, P.O. Matigada.
2. Sibamangal Tewari P.O. Tistabridge.

## HOOGHLY

1. Narendranath Mukherji, Baligodi Adhannani Vidyamandir, P.O. Baligodi.
2. Anil Kumar Bhattacharya, Jagatpur Jr. High School, Vill. and P.O. Jagatpur..
3. Headmaster, Bhuruluda Jr. High School, Vill. and P.O. Bhurkunda.
4. Jamini K. Das, Jirat Colony High School, P.O. Jirat. M.A. B.T.
5. Haridas Kar, Vill. Dhanyaghor, P.O. Bandar.
6. Satish Chandra Ghose, Vill. and P.O. Nabakunda.
7. Mrinal Kanti Basu, Gourhati Haridas Institute, Vill. and P.O. Gourhati.
8. Saptakari P. Chatterjee, B.A. Vill. Gopalbati, P.O. Kamarpukur.
9. Nirendranath Chaki, Pursuda Jr. High School, P.O. Pursuda.
10. Ekkari Chakravarti, Vill. Ubidpur, P.O. Khanakul.
11. Bhupendranath Halder, Mahanad Senior Basic School, P.O. Mahanad.



12. Sontosh Kumar Kundu, Laksanpur Junior High School, P.O.  
Laksanpur.

13. Dhanapati Mandal, Vill. and P.O. Akna, Akna Jr. High School.

#### HOWRAH

1. Subal chandra Mandal, Baidyanathpur Senior Basic School,  
P.O. Baidynathpur.

2. Vivekananda Pal, Belari Vivekananda Vidyamandir, Vill. and  
P.O. Belari.

3. Kalipada Das, Jagatpur Adarsha Vidyalay, P.O. Vrindavanpur.

4. { Amjed Ali Sekh, Vill. Paikpari, P.O. Ramchandrapur.  
{ Batakrisna Chaudhuri P.O. Gobardhanpur.

5. Paritosh Chakravorti, Kavy-Vyakaran Krityatirtha, Vill.  
and P.O. Radhapur.

6. Haripada Maity, Vill. Debandi, P.O. Manikura.

7. Nikunjabehari Dhar Vill. and P.O. Amta.

8. Satish Chandra Sadhukhan, Deulpur High English School,  
Denlpur.

9. Nagendranath Mandal, Joynagar Naskarpur F.O. Junior  
High School.

10. Sibacharan Santra, Vill. and P.O. Kulitapara.

11. Bibhuti Bhusan Chakravanti, M.A. Joyarkol, P.O. Ganeshpur.,  
Shyampur High School.

12. Mahananda Ghada, Ekabbarpur Junior High School, P.O.

Jujusa.

13. Yatindranath Patra, Vill. Baneswarpur, P.O. Anuliya.
14. Ashutosh Paladhi Vill. Singti, P.O. Singti Sibpur.
15. Sunil Kumar Jeti, Vill. Ghosalchak, P.O. Belkulai.
16. Hiralal Mallik, P.O. Belapur, Caudanapara.
17. Banchanan Das, Tetulkuli Jr. High School, P.O. Makaddaha

#### JALPAIGURI

1. Padmalochan Ray, Vill. Salbari, P.O. Dhupguri.
2. Akshay Chandra Chakravarty, Satali Jr. High School,  
P.O. Dakshin Satali.
3. Shyamapada Ghose, P.O. Baradighi.
4. Ray Dinanath Adhikari, Headmaster, Vhujaripara Moharchand  
Jr. High School, P.O. Jalpeshmandir.
5. Krishna Kumar Biswas, Headmaster, Vatibari Jr. High School,  
P.O. Vatibari.
6. Girish Chandra Sarkar, Headmaster, Baniapara Chourasta  
Jr. High School, P.O. Nathoahat.
7. Arjun Parikar, Headmaster, Chengmari Tea Estate High  
School, P.O. Sadhopur Chengmari.
8. Sudhangsu Mazumdar, Headmaster, Manikgang Jr. High School,  
P.O. Manikgang.
9. Phani Bhusan Bagchi, Barabisa Jr. High School, P.O. Barabisa.
10. Jjotirmoyi Datta, Falakata Girls' Jr. High School, P.O.  
Falakata.

11. Dilip Kumar Bhaumik, Rajadanga P.M. Jr. High School,  
P.O. Mal.
12. Umesh Chandra Ray Suba, Vill. and P.O. Purba Duramari.
13. Hari Dayal Ray, P.O. Daukimari.
14. Panchanan Singha, Mission School, P.O. Mal.
15. Sumati Bikash Datta, Gajendra Bidya Mandir, P.O. Damdim.
16. Sudhir Chandra Tagore, Rajamohan Jr. High School, P.O.  
Gomairhat.

## MALDA

1. Subhendumohan Baksi, B.Sc., M.A., B.T., Raygram High  
School, P.O. Amriti
2. Khagendranath Saha, Bishuupur Junior High School, P.O.  
Bishuupur.
3. Prahalad Chandra Jha, Durlabhpur Jr. High School, P.O.  
Sattari.
4. Rajendranath Karmakar, Gobindopara, P.O. Malatipur.
5. Dhiren Das, M.A. LL.B., Makdampur.
6. Krishnalal Sarkar, Kumbhira Jr. High School, P.O. Sabdalpur.
7. Jyotilal Misra, Vill. and P.O. Ekvarna.
8. Bibhuti-Bhusan Misra, Akanda Badiya S.C. Jr. High School,  
P.O. Sahabajpur.
9. Khagendranath Biswas, B.Com., Nalagola Jr. High School, P.O.  
Nalagola.

10. Harekrishna Trivedi, Sahitya Vinod, Mallikpara Jr. High School, P.O. Mallikpara.
11. Bidhubhusan Ray, Rathbari Jr. High School, P.O. Birampur.
12. Monohar Mandal, Vill. Madhugram, P.O. Mujapur.
13. Arati Lala, Aiho Girls' Jr. High School, P.O. Muchiya.
14. Sadarpur Junior High School, P.O. Chancal.
15. Mahmud-al-Hasan, P.O. Alinagar.
16. { Biswanath Kundu, P.O. Mothabari.  
{ Kalicharan Mandal
17. Shyamapada Saha Ray, B.A., P.O. Tulsihata.
18. Teachers of Morabadpur Jr. High School, P.O. Devigang.
19. M. Imdadur Rahman, Lakshmipur Jr. High School, P.O. Purba-Ranipur.
20. Abdus Samad B.A. A.C.C. trained. Sadlichak Jr. High School. P.O. Kunedpur.

#### MIDNAPUR

1. Ramkrishna Samanta, Kalai Gobardhan Jr. High School, P.O. Kalukhanda.
2. Radhanath Maity, B.A., Pindarni Jr. High School, P.O. Pindarni.
3. Subhendu Sekhar Chaudhuri, Vill. Arjuni, P.O. Sadihat.
4. Rabindranath Bera, P.O. Laksi.
5. Sasanka Sekhar Singha Hajari, B.A. B.T., Maharajpur Jr. High School, P.O. Maharajpur.

6. Hrishikesh Mitra, ~~S~~ipur Kesaveswar Jr. High School, P.O. ~~S~~ipur.
7. Haladhar Mahat, Baligedya Jr. High School, P.O. Baligedya, Via. Kesiya.
8. Haripada Mukhopadhyay, Nachipur Jr. High School, P.O. Nepura.
9. - Anon - Bathuyadi.
10. Bireswar Chaudhuri, Angu Gadadhar Jr. High School, P.O. Angua.
11. Paresnath Ray, Gohalpadga Jr. High School, P.O. Gohaldanga.
12. Muralidhar Mandal, Vill. Kalinja, P.O. Petabindhi.
13. Madanmohan Samanta Vill. Balarampur, P.O. Bandar.
14. Aswini Kumar Maity, B.A., Kukrahati Jr. High School, P.O. Kukrahati.
15. Jitendranath Mitra, Vill. and P.O. Kalagram.
16. Jitendranath Maity, Vill. and P.O. Darnya.
17. Byomkesh Pattanayak, Bakulda Jr. High School, P.O. Shyansundarpur [Patna].
18. Nilratan Mandal, Vill. and P.O. Gaura, Daspur.
19. Shyamsundar Jana, Vill. Bhagibrahmapur, P.O. Digba.
20. Nidarsan Chattopadhyay, Mangrul B. 4 class H.E. School, Mangrul.
21. Yogendranath Kavyavyakaran Smrititirtha, Srinivas Catuspathi and Srirampur Jr. High School, Vill. and P.O. Srirampur.

22. Sri Ramtarak Panda, Kavya-Vyakarautirtha, Kantod Mahadev Jr. High School, Vill. and P.O. Humgad.
23. Aksay Kumar Mahat, Patasimul S.C. Jr. High School P.O. Beleberah, Jhargram.
24. Kartik Chandra De, Khasbad Jr. High School, P.O. Khasbad.
25. Bimalendhu Pahari, Kavyatirtha, Kalicharanpur Dayamayi Jr. High School Vill. and P.O. Daudpur.
26. Padmalochan De, Santra Kamallochau Jr. High School, P.O. Thasteghari.
27. Rabindranath Jana, Paukhai B.M. Institution, P.O. Paukhai.
28. Subodh Kumar Maity, Baratala Jr. High School, P.O. Ramchak.
29. Somnath Bhattacharya, Kavya-Vyakarautirtha, Dhalhara Pagli-mata Jr. High School.
30. B. Datta, M.A., Deshapraya Higher Secondary School, P.O. Ramichak.
31. Prafulla Kumar Maity, B.A., Vill. Barhat, P.O. Katrakka.
32. B.K. Manna, B.Sc. B.Trd., P.O. Bhimesvari Bazar.
33. Anil Bhattacharya, Dadra, P.O. Pingla (Kherai).
34. Tarachand Bhattacharya, Kavyatirtha, Tilantapara Mahendra Jr. High School, Vill. and P.O. Bhemun.
35. Santosh Chandra De, Gohamidanga Jr. High School, P.O. Dharmapur.
36. Bidhubhusan Adhikari, Kakgechia Satyanarayan Jr. High School, P.O. Kakgechia.

37. Kalachand Mandal, K.D.S.C. 2nd Class Jr. High School,  
Banspahari.
38. Manibhusan Santra, Abasbari High School.
39. Ramkrishna Pradhan, Bagdobajalpai Jr. High School. P.O.  
Caudipur.
40. Nagendranath Jana, Babupur agricultural Jr. High School,  
Vill. Babupur, P.O. Kukvahati.
41. Prabhat Kunar Maity, Krishnanagar Manindranath Jr.  
High School, P.O. Krishnanagar. Kanthi.
42. Subhendubikas Tripathi, Ektal D.M.Jr. High School, P.O.  
Chaudri.
43. Birendranath Bhuyna, Vill. Cholaberah, P.O. Kesiypata.
44. { Probdh Carndra Bhuyna,  
          Kumar  
          { Sachindrak / Chakravarti, Kavya-Vyakarantirtha  
Saukoya Gurncaran. Jr. High School, P.O. Saukya.
45. Monoranjan Adagiri, B.A. Tihkhoja Baikuntha Vidyayatan,  
P.O. Tilkhoja.
46. Rangjit Kunar Bera, B.A., Vill. and P.O. Madhabpur.
47. Teachers of Manglapota High School, P.O. Khadkusma.
48. Jagannath Bhuyna, Panchgedya Jr. High School, Vill.  
Yesuya P.O. Alokkendra.
49. Phanindranath kavya-Vyakarantirtha, Laksya High School,  
P.O. Laksya.
50. Gaurhari Das, Kalaganda Rajani Vidyabhavan, P.O. Dobandi.

51. Kanai Kandar, Vill. Markanda Chak, P.O. Pristupur Bazar.
52. Amar Kumar Sarkar, Sen Bharati, P.O. Padihati.

#### MURSHIDABAD

1. Dwarikanath Mandal, Jaypur Jr. High School, P.O. Jaypur.
2. Yamini Mohon Mandal, B.A., Singar Jr. High School, P.O. Navagram.
3. Sukhendu Kumar Sengupta, Baidyapur, P.O. Tenya.
4. Amarchandra Ray, Dadpur Jr. High School, P.O. Dadpur.
5. Ardhendu K. Ray, Indrani.
6. Prabhat K. Singha, Jajam Jr. High School, P.O. Jajam.
7. Kalipada Bhattacharja, Vyakarantirtha, Khenkul Jr. School P.O. Itore.
8. Mahimaranjan Chakravanti, Kavya-Vyakaran Purantirtha Nayansuk High School, P.O. Nayansuk.
9. Sudharanja Das, Balia Jr. High School, P.O. Balia.
10. Bholanath Singha, Vill. Ramnagar, P.O. Bachra.
11. Dhirendranath Datta, Bishaharitala, P.O. Naspara.
12. Ajit Kumar Saha, Chancanda Lower Primary School P.O. Lohorpur.
13. Kendiram Ghose, Maniknagar Jr. High School, P.O. Manikuagar.
14. Basudev Pramanik, Sargachi Ram Krishna Mission Basic teachers' training School, P.O. Sargaehi.
15. Dulal Chandra Ghose, Ram Krishna Mission Basic School, P.O. Sargachi.



16. Nanda Kumar Haldar, Bhutni Candipur Jr. High School,  
P.O. Sukdertola.
17. Radhika Sukul, B.A. B.T., Dukanpur High School, P.O.  
Rukanpur.
18. Bishnupada Ghose, Parsalika, P.O. Panchthupi.
19. Gaurisankar Mukhopadhyay, Vill. and P.O. Sahapur.
20. Sribas candra Pal, Vill. and P.O. Rajhat.
21. Md. Jaïd Ali, Shaikpara Pragati Sangha, P.O. Babaltali.
22. Radhakanta Pal, Khampur, P.O. Nonadanga.
23. Basukinath Chakravarti, Kavya-Vyakarantirtha, Kharjuna,  
P.O. Audi.
24. Kaliprasanna Majumdar, Kusabaria Jr. High School, P.O.  
Garibpur.
25. Dr. Amirchand Mandal, Pirtala, P.O. Diyad Fatepur.

#### NADIA

1. Kamal Kumar Sanyal P.O. Santipur.
2. Ajit Kumar Pal, Ucha Buniyadi Vidyalay, P.O. Daksimpara.
3. Ram Chandra Saha, Hijuly Siksahi Ketau Jr. High School,  
P.O. Hijuly.
4. Ksetramohon Chakravarti, Bapujinagar Jr. High School,  
P.O. Bapujinagar.
5. Bibhuti Bhusan Chaudhuri, B.A., Vill. and P.O. Dharmada.

6. Haranchandra Biswas, Vill. and P.O. Bhajaughat.
7. Ranendranath Pramanik, Vill. and P.O. Cauderghat.
8. Md. Shahidul Huq, Basharkhola Jr. High School, P.O. Kaligung.
9. Kumudnath Sarkar, Ghurni High School, P.O. Krishnanagar.
10. Satyanarayan Chakravarti, P.O. Baliadanga.
11. Nrisingha Prasad Chakravarti, Bamaupukur Jr. High School, P.O. Bamanpukur.
12. Panchanan Biswas, Palashipara.
13. Prafulla Kumar Banerji, Kavya-Vyakarantirtha, Dignagar Jr. High School, P.O. Dignagar.
14. Bipin Chandra Biswas, Birpur Jr. High School, P.O. Birpur.
15. Yatindranath Mandal, Fatepur Jr. High School, P.O. Suvarnapur.
16. Anubha Sircar, Bahirgaehi, P.O. Hal Bahirgachi.

#### 24 PARGANAS

1. Nityananda Das, Dwanagar Moksadadinda Jr. High School, P.O. Dwarikanagar.
2. Lalmohan Mandal, Satjelia Jr. High School, Gosaba.
3. Head Master, Chaubaria, Dinabandhu Vidyalay, Chaubaria.
4. Shyamapada Bera, Chakkrishnarampur, P.O. Phalta.
5. Yaminibhusan Padui, P.O. Sahararhat, Phalta.
6. Narendranath Chattopadhyay, Vill. and P.O. Sarisa.

7. Haripada Ghosh, M.A. B.T., Chayghariya Rakhalidas High School, P.O. Chayghariya.
8. Phanibhusan Hira, Manikkool Jr. High School, P.O. Gopalnagar.
9. Niranjana Niyogi, Raypur Narendranath Vidyamandir, P.O. Gheri Raypur.
10. Bipin Bihari Mandal, P.O. Jaynagar, Majilpur.
11. Pranesh Ranjan Mandal, Istaranpur Jr. High School, P.O. Ghoradal.
12. Ramsidhari Mallik, Jamtala, P.O. Keodatala.
13. St. Xavier's Junior Technical School, P.O. Basanti.
14. Shyamapada Datta, Rajibpur Jr. High School, P.O. Achipur.
15. Gaurangadev Pal, M.A., L.L.B. Mokhali High School, P.O. Chinta.
16. Palan Chandra Purakait, Bankishorpur-Radhanagar Jr. School P.O. Radhanagar.
17. { Sudhir Chandra Gayan , Amtali Jaygopalpur Jr. High School.  
( Satish Chandra Mandal , P.O. Amtali.
18. Hrishikesh Santra, Atapur Keharam Jr. High School. P.O. Tushkhali.
19. Nalini Kanta Das, Vill. and P.O. Manmatthapur, Via. Kakdwip.
20. Nibratan Majumdar, Bhajna Ramchandrapur Jr. High School P.O. Ramchandrapur.

21. Shyamal Gupta, Adhata Higher Secondary School, P.O.

Adhata.

22. Madan Mohan Samanta. Samali Bholanath Jr. High School.

23. Biswapati Ojha, Vill. and P.O. Brajaballavapur, South Mathurapur.

24. Susanta Halder, Vill. Bajitpur, P.O. Mangalganj.

#### WEST DINAJPUR

1. Bhabeschandra Ghosh, B.A. B.T. Baul Parameswar High School, P.O. Ramkrishnapur.

2. Niharendu Majumdar, P.O. Chingispur.

3. Samarendranath Saha, Marnai Saratchandra Jr. High School, P.O. Marnai.

4. Sitiesh Chandra Ray, Sahityabhusan, Kavya Purantirtha P.O. Balurghat.

5. Gaurgopal Chakravarti Kavya-Vyakarantirtha. Trimohini School, P.O. Hili.

6. Headmaster, Itahar High School, P.O. Itahar.

7. Prasanta Kumar Datta, Dehuchi, P.O. Hemtabad.

8. Ksitish Chandra Singha, Bindol Jr. High School, P.O. Bindol.

9. Ajit Kumar Das, Maharajahat Jr. High School, P.O. Maharajahat.

10. Janardan De, Press Reporter, P.O. Raigang.

11. Indra Narayan Bhattacharya, P.O. Churamon.
12. Narayan Chandra Sarkar, Samaspur Jr. High School, P.O. Samaspur.
13. Harendranath Ghosh, Bhelai Jr. High School, P.O. Bhelai.
14. Nripendranath Sarkar }  
Kalinath Chakravarti } Nazirpur, P.O. Khanpur
15. Md. Amzad, Mahipal Free Primary School, P.O. Mahipal.
16. Hiranmay Das, Vill. and P.O. Majhiar.
17. Dr. Sailesh Chandra Nandi, Sarbamangala Jr. High School Vill. and P.O. Sarbamangla.

## ASSAM

1. P. Goswami, M.A., D.Phil., Reader in English, Gauhati University.

Notes on Illustrations

A. Images said to be of Manasā

1. Stone, From Deopara, Rajshahi; now in Rajshahi Museum, East Pakistan.
2. Stone, From Khidrapalli, Rajshahi; now in Rajshahi Museum, East Pakistan.
3. Stone, From Bihar; now in Indian Museum, Calcutta.
4. ? , From Bengal; now in Rangpur Sāhitya Parisad Museum, East Pakistan.
5. Stone, From Tapan, Dinajpur; now in Rajshahi Museum, East Pakistan.
6. Stone, From Badal, Dinajpur; now in Rajshahi Museum, East Pakistan.
7. Bronze, From Rajshahi; now in Indian Museum, Calcutta.

8. Bronze, From Bengal; now in British Museum, London.
9. Stone, From Tundara, Balasor, Orissa.
10. ? , From Silghat, Nowgong, Assam.
11. ? , From Banshihari, Dinajpur, Bengal.
12. ? , From Bhadiswar, Birbhum, Bengal.

B. Kotavāsini or Kotāsani

13. ? , From Mayurabhanja, Orissa.

C. Pārsvanātha

14. Stone, From Dharapata, Bankura, Bengal.

D. Jagatgauri or Jagatgauri-Manasā

15. Stone, From Jayakrishnapur, Bankura, Bengal.
16. Stone, From Narkeldanga, Burdwan, Bengal.

E. Present day Manasā images.

17. Earthen, From Dakshinpara, Nadia, Bengal.
18. Earthen, From Lakshmanpur, Hooghly, Bengal.
19. Earthen, From Bishnupur, Bankura, Bengal.

F. Padmāvatī

20. Stone, From Rajgir, Bihar.

G. Trailokyavijaya

21. Stone, now Nalanda Museum, Bihar.

H. Image worshipped as Manasā

22. Brass, From Kidderpore, 24 Parganas, Bengal.

I. Pots used at Manasā worship

23. (a & b) Earthen, From Panchmuda, Bishnupur, Bankura, Bengal.

24. Earthen, From Panchmuda, Bishnupur, Bankura, Bengal.

J. Printed Pictures used at Manasā worship

25. From Dharmada, Nadia, Bengal.

26. From Kumbira, Sabdalpur, Malda, Bengal.

K. Symbolic representation of Manasā

27. From Rajghat, Murshidabad, Bengal.

L. Printed picture used at the time of Vrata

28. From Kumbira, Sabdalpur, Malda, Bengal.

M. Jhānpān Ceremony

29. From the original painting of F.B. Solvyns.

30. From Bishnupur, Bankura, Bengal.

31. From Bishnupur, Bankura, Bengal.





Plate-1. Deopara, Rajshahi, East Bengal.





Plate- 2. Khidrapalli, Rajshahi, East Bengal.





Plate - 3. Bihar.





Plate - 4. Bengal.





Plate - 5. Tapan, Dinajpur, West Bengal.





Plate - 6. Badal, Dinaipur, West Bengal.





Plate- 7. Rajshahi, Bengal





Plate - 8. Bengal.





Plate - 9. Tundara, Balasor, Orrissa.





Plate-10, Silghat, Nowgong, Assam.





Plate - 11. Baneshihari, Dinajpur, Bengal.





Plate - 12. Bhadriswar, Birbhum, Bengal.





Plate - 13. Mayurbhanja, Orissa.





Plate - 14. Dharapata, Bankura, Bengal.





Plate - 15. Jayakrishnapur, Bankura, Bengal.





Plate - 16. Narkeldanga, Burdwan, Bengal.





Plate - 17. Dakshinpara, Nadia, Bengal.



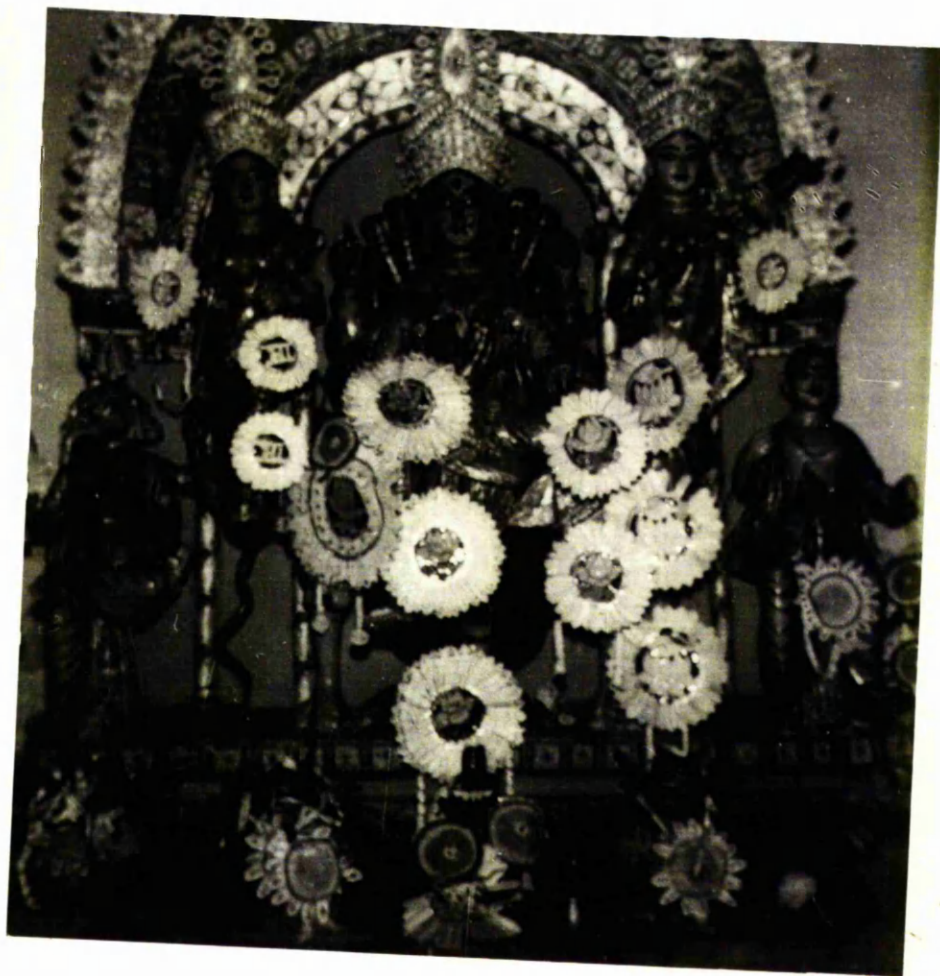


Plate - 18. Lakshanpur, Hooghly, Bengal.



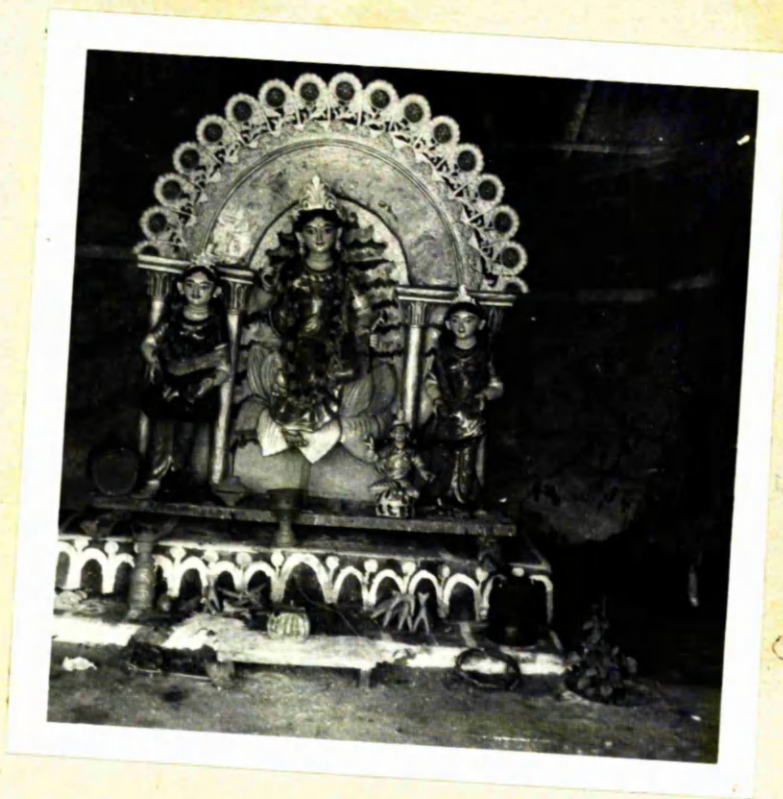


Plate - 19. Bishnupur, Bankura, Baengal.





Plate- 20. Rajgir, Bihar.





Plate - 21. From Nalanda Museum, Bihar.





Plate - 22. Kidderpore, 24 Parganas.





Plate- 23(a). Panchmuda, Bishnupur, Bankura, Bengal.

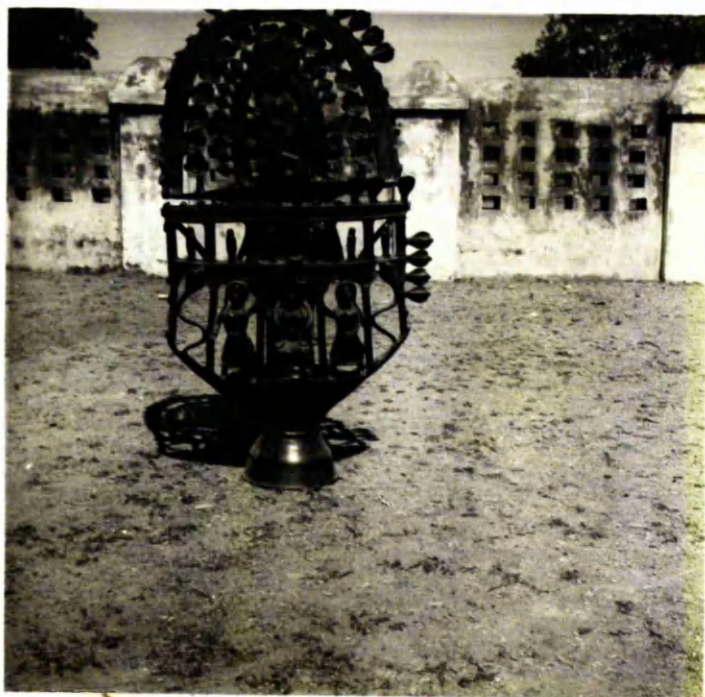


Plate 23(b). Panchmuda, Bishnupur, Bankura, Bengal.



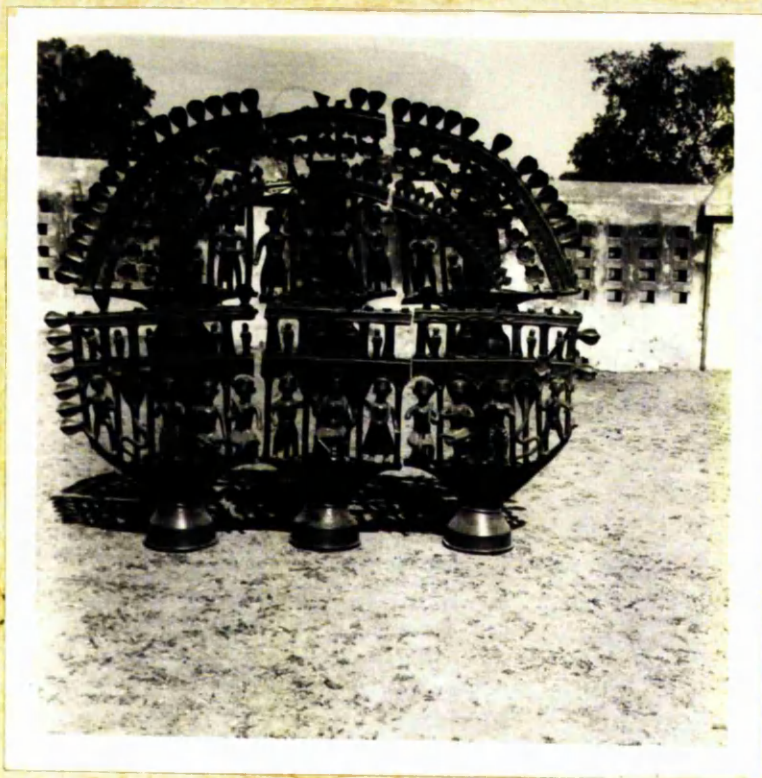


Plate 24. Panchmuda, Bishnupur, Bankura, Bengal.





Plate- 25. Dharmada, Nadia, Bengal.





Plate- 26. Kumbira, Sabdalpur, Malda, Bengal.





Plate - 27. Rajghat, Murshidabad, Bengal.



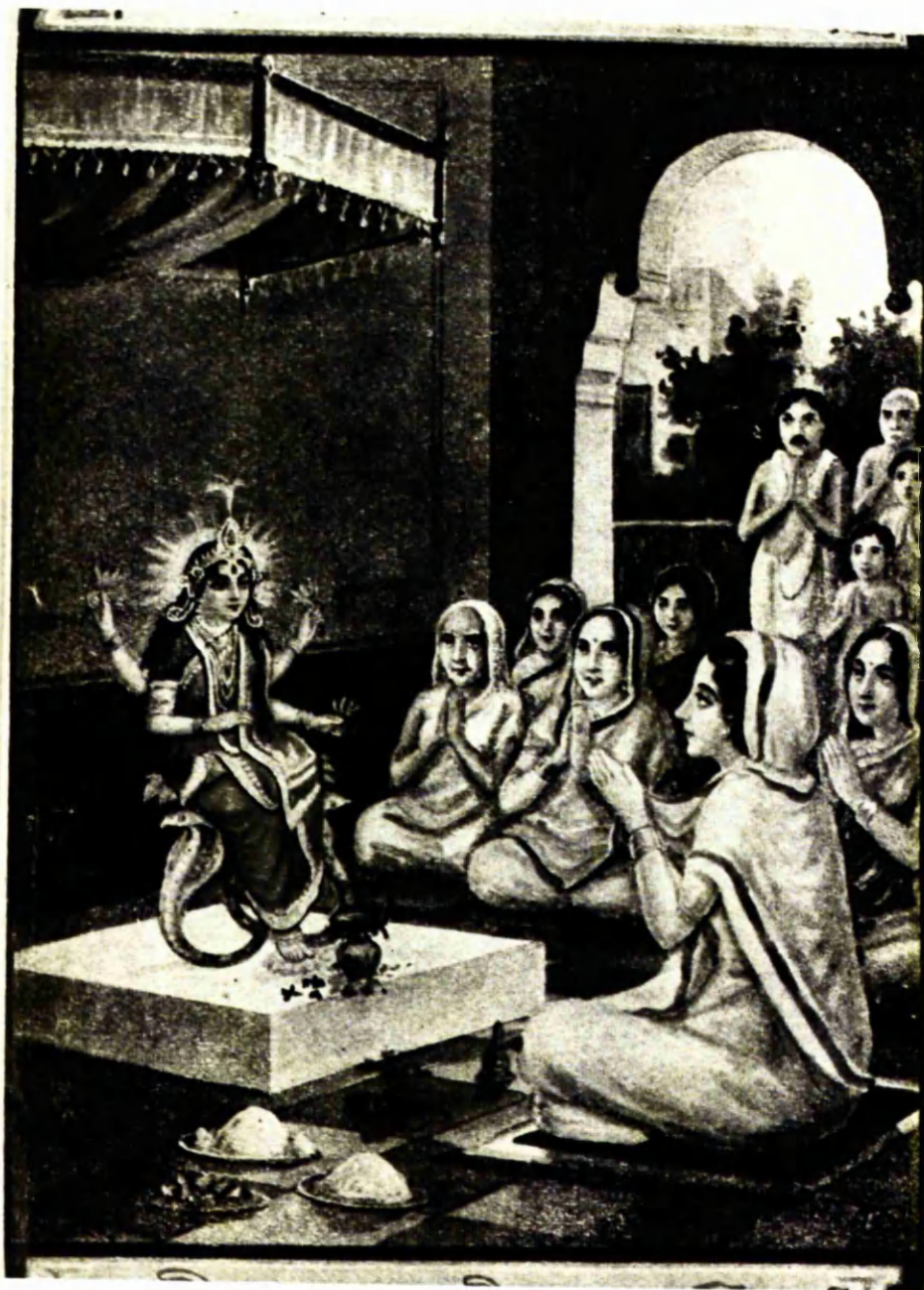


Plate-28. Kumbira, Sadulpur, Malda, Bengal.





Plate-29. From the original painting of F.B.Solvyns.





Plate - 30. Bishnupur, Bankura, Bengal.





Plate- 31. Bishnupur, Bankura, Bengal.